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**Beyond the Smoke**  
**that Thunders**



By **LUCY POPE CULLEN**

*Illustrated by Julian Brazelton*

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*To the three D's:*

DOROTHY

DAVE

and

DOUGLAS

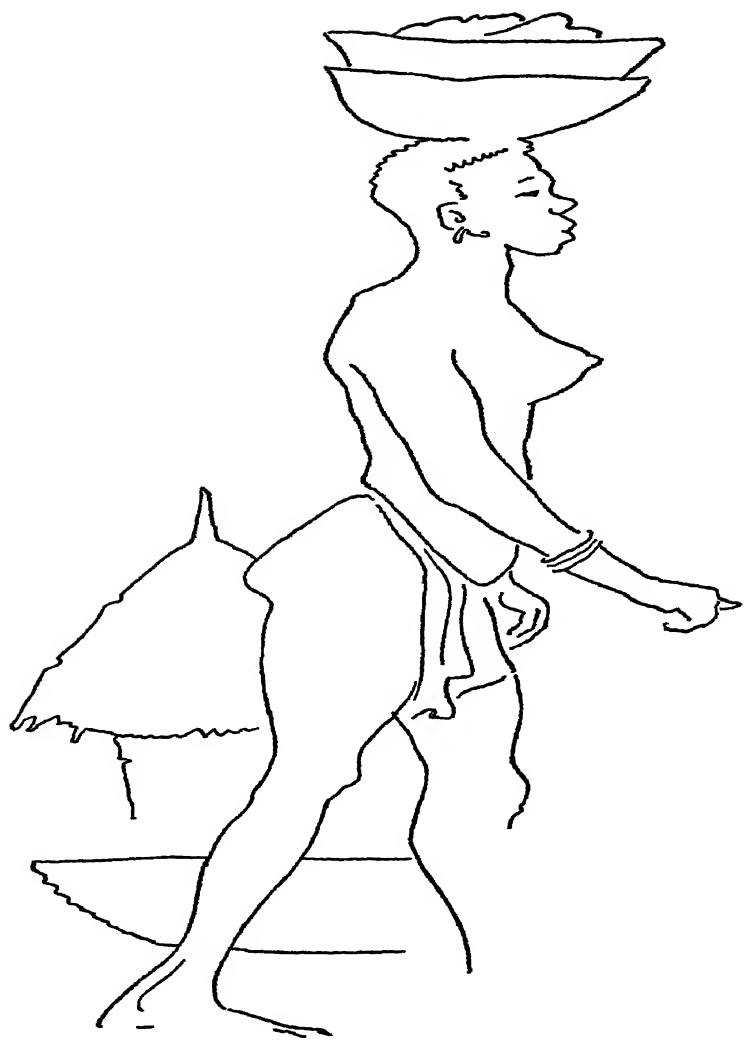


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## *To the Roan*



IN THE SPRING of 1928 I was working in a New York office, living in a small apartment on East Seventeenth Street, and enjoying the doubtful privilege of two daily rides on the Lexington Avenue subway. Coming home one June afternoon, I found the letter in the mailbox downstairs.

My yelp of excitement as I read it caused Lazarus, the elevator boy, to leap a good six inches in the air, which practically constituted a record in motion for him. Lazarus was very black, and his name was peculiarly appropriate, for each time the elevator crept up, at long last, from the depths of the basement, you felt as if someone had literally been raised from the dead.

'We're sailing from New York the end of July,' concluded the letter. 'Do you think you could be ready by then?'

Could I be ready? I yelped again, and waved the sheet under Lazarus's broad and startled nose.

'What do you think, Lazarus?' I cried. 'I'm going to Africa to live! Africa, Lazarus, Africa!'

Lazarus's eyes popped, then rolled skyward. 'Oh, lawdy, Miss

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Lucy,' he moaned, 'don' you do it. You goin' be et by camels!'

This slight confusion of ideas caused me to giggle rudely, but Lazarus was still shaking his head when I left the elevator. His parting injunction echoed hollowly along the narrow hallway as I inserted the key in the door of my apartment.

'Bes' stay way fum dem camels, Miss Lucy—dey shore means business!'

My large and equally dark cook, to whom I next broke the glad news, took a somewhat different view of the matter.

'You goin' Af'ca?' she exclaimed incredulously. 'Unh-unh!'—on the Negro's peculiarly resonant note of protest. 'You ain' goin' like dat, chile, 'cause you ain' use to it. Take me, now, I'se use to it, an' das all right, far as it goes—but you gotta be born dat way. Whut all yo' frens goin' say, honey, w'en you comes back all black up?'

If none of the other comments on my plans were quite as naïve as those of Lazarus and Rebecca, most of them were characterized by the same gloomy note of foreboding. The best that I could look forward to in Africa, apparently, was an early demise resulting from sunstroke, snakebite, sleeping sickness, typhoid fever, malaria, or smallpox—unless, of course, I first happened to get in the way of one of the larger species of fauna that inhabited the dark continent. Accent was placed on this particular hazard by an earnest, if inebriated, gentleman I met at a cocktail party.

'The thing you've got to look out for,' he said to me at once, 'is a wounded buffalo.'

I waited for the thought to be developed, but it was not. It was, however, repeated at regular intervals throughout the afternoon, its author fixing me each time with an increasingly

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stern and glassy eye. The stark reiteration of any theme gives it a certain impressiveness; as I walked home at dusk that afternoon a menacing bellow mingled with the sound of taxi horns, a sinister and angry bulk loomed around every corner of Madison Avenue.

I felt, altogether, extremely intrepid as I embarked a few weeks later with Dave and Dorothy Irwin and their thirteen-year-old son, Dave Junior, for the long voyage to Africa.

A glance at the map of Africa shows that a long toe of the Belgian Congo almost cuts Northern Rhodesia in half. Only on a modern map, however, will an odd group of names be found in the western half, close to the Congo border. Roan Antelope, Nkana, Nchanga, Mufulira, Bwana M'kubwa, Chambishi, Chingola, Baluba: names of ore occurrences in the Northern Rhodesian copperfields, the giant infant of the mining industry.

Several of the Rhodesian orebodies were discovered at the beginning of the century. But the railway ended then at Bulawayo, seven hundred miles to the south; and samples brought out by prospectors showed a low grade of oxide copper, which was not worth mining in such an inaccessible spot, or refining by the methods that were then in use.

Twenty-five years went by, during which the railroad was extended and a new refining technique worked out, before interest in Rhodesian copper awakened again. It was galvanized into action this time, when geologists sent out by British financial interests reported, under the scant oxidized surface outcrops found by early prospectors, the buried presence of half a dozen vast deposits of valuable sulphide ore.

Though the mining companies organized for exploitation

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purposes were essentially British in character, America was well represented. A portion of the necessary capital was raised in the United States, there were American names on each list of directors, and several American geologists had taken prominent part in the preliminary survey. For supervision of the tremendous task involved in developing the Rhodesian mines, the directorates again turned toward America, where a long-established copper industry had furnished engineering experience of the sort required.

The first by several months to launch its development programme was the Roan Antelope Copper Mines, Ltd. David D. Irwin, a graduate of the Yale Engineering School, who was at the time General Superintendent of the Phelps Dodge Corporation's Copper Queen Branch at Bisbee, Arizona, was appointed General Manager, to take charge in Rhodesia of the work on the property soon to be known popularly as 'the Roan.'

My own chance to go to the Roan was one of those pieces of luck that come along once in a lifetime. It was based on the fact that Dave Irwin had married my cousin Dorothy. When he was advised to bring a secretary out to Rhodesia with him, I got the job.

Though life in the Rhodesian copperfields did not prove as precarious as my friends' prognostications had seemed to indicate, sharply contrasting elements turned it into a curious and vivid experience. In the foreground was the growth of a big modern industry, and a social atmosphere blending American mining camp with British colony. In the background, intensified by the lost sad cry of a river bird, by the idiot laugh

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of a hyena, by the rhythmic beat of a tribal drum—and now shattered, strangely, by the scream of automatic hammer and drill—lay the silence of an old, old continent.

The out-of-the-way character of the district for which we were headed was sharply presaged during our original journey to the Roan. We happened to constitute the only party of Americans on the *Windsor Castle* out of Southampton for Cape Town; most of the other passengers were English people going on business or holiday trips to the Union of South Africa, or South Africans returning from business or pleasure trips to England.

Though taken at first for casual tourists, news of our actual destination and plans produced practically the same reaction in all of our shipboard acquaintances. At mention of Northern Rhodesia, each one said, 'Oh, really?' in a tone that was surprised, dubious and not a little vague. Even to those who had lived in the Union a long time, Northern Rhodesia apparently seemed as remote as if it were on another continent.

Actually embarked on the long train journey north, we began to understand why this was so. We made a slight detour to visit Johannesburg, we broke the trip again at Bulawayo and at Victoria Falls, but even if we had gone the shortest possible way, straight through Mafeking, and had not stopped at all, it would have taken us five full days and nights of steady travelling to reach the mine. We knew this beforehand, of course, but no considerable journey ever sounds, or looks on a map, anything like as far as it feels.

Until you pass Johannesburg, going north through Africa, you feel as if you were still in a European and a more or less familiar world—'European' being a word used over there to

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designate the white race, regardless of nationality. In the street of Cape Town, the proportion of white, mulatto and black faces seems about the same as would be observed in a southern city like Atlanta. The dress of the latter two groups is much the same, too. The villages through which the train passes in the Union are sometimes Dutch, sometimes English in character and are set fairly close together. Johannesburg, for all its thousands of black mine workers, is distinctly a modern European metropolis.

It was not until we were crossing the Kalahari Desert in Bechuanaland that the veneer of modern civilization began to grow thin, and the continent obviously became one people predominantly by members of another and still primitive race. Bechuana natives, the colour of whose skin was an almost perfect match to the plain that ran away to the distant horizon, flocked to the train at the infrequent stops, outnumbering any white people who happened to be about by at least twenty to one.

There is Hottentot blood in a good many of the Bechuanas, and their wide grins expose sets of remarkably white teeth, sharpened in most cases to alarming points. They offered us animal skins for sale, grass baskets, a large variety of grotesquely carved wooden curios, necklaces cut from horn or made of exotic seeds strung together—and occasionally a homely item, like a few eggs or a watermelon. Anyone who happened to have it wore an odd European garment or two; otherwise a loin-cloth solved the Bechuana clothing problem nicely. The pot-bellied piccannins were starkly and comfortably naked.

Then we were in Bulawayo, our first stop in one of the Rhodesias. Bulawayo, the Place of Blood, named in memory



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of the Matabele wars. For all its modern office buildings and pleasant residential districts, Bulawayo seemed to us to wear the distinct air of a frontier town, and we were rather startled to learn that it had reminded a great many Rhodesians of the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street. If you sat in the lobby of the Grand Hotel long enough, it seemed, everyone you knew would come along sooner or later.

Feeling that the wait in our case might prolong itself indefinitely, we went out to exclaim over the width of the streets, planned by Cecil Rhodes so that a wagon drawn by sixteen oxen might turn handily in any one of them, and to see the house, with its lovely South African Dutch façade, built by Rhodes on the site originally occupied by the kraal of Lobengula, the last great Matabele chief, who had died during his tribe's final war with the early Southern Rhodesian settlers.

Near one end of the long white structure was the white-washed rondavel, or circular, single-room hut, which Rhodes had used while the house was being built. The door of the rondavel had been cut, for some reason, very low.

On our way through South Africa we had seen any number of statues of Rhodes. It had been pointed out to us how each one faced north, to look perpetually, as Rhodes had looked so often in life, toward the land that he loved and that bears his name. The lowness of that rondavel door now stood out as a significant detail, for Rhodes was exceptionally tall, and must have had to hunch his heavy shoulders uncomfortably every time he went in and out. The familiar figure of an Empire Builder, standing remotely on its series of pedestals, was suddenly the figure of a human being, subject to human inconvenience, as well.

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Beyond the house stood the ancient *Indaba Tree*, under which the paramount chief, Lobengula, had once given audience to his *indunas*, the lesser chiefs of the Matabele tribe.

From beneath the tree, and from the stoop of the house, could be seen away in the distance the *Thabas Induna*, the tall stone kopje on which Lobengula had been wont to demonstrate the quality of Matabele mercy, patterned on that of the tribe's Zulu forbears. An *induna*, condemned to death by Lobengula, had not been butchered as an ox or a common tribesman was butchered, but had been allowed to don his full war regalia and to march, a man on his own feet, over the sheer cliff face of the Hill of the Chiefs.

One afternoon, pursuing the round followed by every visitor to Bulawayo, we went out to the Matopos. The deep admiration for Rhodes, which is constantly evidenced in the country he called 'my north,' is not, of course, universally shared. But I cannot imagine anyone standing entirely unmoved by the grave on the granite hilltop known as *World's View*. Rhodes may have foreseen this, of course; his critics have suggested that his selection of a burial place was the final dramatization of a career that had never been anything but intensely dramatic. Or perhaps his partisans are nearer the mark in believing that under all his complexities of motive and desire lay a passionate urge toward a fundamental simplicity.

At any rate, the greenness of grass and trees, the scent of flowers, the song of birds, with which most of us instinctively seek to soften the harsh fact of death, are completely missing at *World's View*. A churned-up sea of rock touches the horizon all round, turning the universe into a conjunction of cold grey granite and hot, metallic sky. The only sound to

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be heard is the steady roar of wind; the only life to be seen in the hundreds of tiny, gaudily coloured lizards—blue, green, yellow, red, striped—that bask in the sun or chase each other about the curves of the great boulders that lie like a handful of giant marbles around the grave, around the plain slab of marble, set flat into the granite hilltop, bearing the unadorned statement:

‘Here lie the remains of Cecil John Rhodes.’

You leave your car, in the Matopos, near a small sentry house set at some distance from World’s View hill, to follow a narrow, winding footpath to its foot. From the sentry house a tall native emerges. He is dressed neatly in khaki shorts and shirt, and a round, fez-like cap. He does not greet you in words at all; he raises his hand in a brief salute, and then silently leads the way to the foot of the hill. You may have to scramble a little at times on the way up, but the back ahead of you remains straight, the bare feet step lightly and surely on the curving face of steep, slippery rock.



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When he reaches the grave, the native stations himself at one end of it, standing with arms folded, face expressionless, eyes looking straight ahead. It is hard to guess what he may be thinking, or whether he is thinking at all. He is a Matabele, and he is there because his tribe have asked for the privilege of guarding, in perpetuity and without pay, the grave of the man who, even as he took their country, found his way to their savage hearts. On your departure he silently follows you back to the sentry house, salutes, and disappears inside.

His presence, which alone cannot possibly be attributed to Rhodes' personal sense of drama, is the high dramatic point of the visit to World's View. Around that dark figure, moving up the hill, there seem to materialize a thousand dark figures, figures that stood there one day to watch the passing upward of a coffin, and to give a white man, for the first and last time in the history of the tribe, the Matabele salute to a paramount chief: 'Bayete!'

On the statue of Rhodes that dominates the crossing of Bulawayo's two main thoroughfares, there is no name at all. When I once ventured to suggest to a resident that strangers might not know who it was, he stared at me in some amazement.

'Who would it be?' he asked. 'This is Rhodesia, isn't it?'

This, we were going to realize before very long, was, indeed, Rhodesia.

We had travelled so far on the South African Railways. Crossing the Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and Bechuanaland, we had been entertained through the windows of the train by a veritable scenic pageant—the country had changed radically in aspect any number of times. We

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had looked out at spectacular mountain ranges, at lovely dreaming farm lands, at a painted desert that was strongly reminiscent of southern Arizona, at stretches of open, grassy veldt, at wooded veldt, and at bare, brown plains.

At Bulawayo we boarded the Beira and Mashonaland and Rhodesia Railways—the Rhodesia Railways for short—for the journey across the remaining corner of Southern Rhodesia, and the full width of Northern Rhodesia. And before very long we stopped looking out of the window between stations, except for an occasional hopeful but always baffled glance. For now the scenery, having changed once more, was obviously through with changing, though we still had some seven hundred miles to go. Vision had narrowed down to a matter of yards; the train, jolting over the narrow-gauge, single-track line, seemed almost to be pushing its own way through a virgin wilderness of dusty, scrub trees. It was not that we lacked interest in the passing scene—wasn't this the Rhodesian bush country, with which we were to be completely surrounded for the next few years? But there was no feel of it to be had through the windows of the train; the edge of the bush was a flat, enigmatic wall, revealing nothing of what might lie inside.

At the boundary between the two Rhodesias we had a brief contact with a familiar world again, in the large, new, and beautifully managed hotel which overlooks the Zambesi's breathtaking plunge at Victoria Falls. But the countenance of a baboon, peering earnestly through my screened window in the early morning, served as a reminder that beyond the tamed grounds of the hotel lay a world that was neither tamed nor familiar.

In the native name for Victoria Falls we learned our first

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piece of lore that belonged to the land before it became Rhodesia. The heavy cloud of spray flung up incessantly by the great cataract can be seen, on a clear day, from a distance of twenty-five miles; the roar of the falling water carries almost as far. To natives living within this radius, David Livingstone's discovery of the Falls had come as a relief as well as a revelation, for they knew that such a unique phenomenon as Mosioa-Tunya, the Smoke that Thunders, could only harbour an *imfwiti*—a malignant spirit whose abode was certainly not a thing to investigate, or even to approach too closely—and so they had long regarded the 'Smoke that Thunders' fearfully and from a respectful distance.

Early Arab slave-traders passing through the country had thought of the Falls in somewhat different terms; to the Arabs the Zambesi's mighty leap marked Musa-i-nunya, the End of the World.

A great many tourists have confirmed the Arab point of view by remarking, on arrival at the Falls, that they felt as if they had reached the ultimate jumping-off place. With very much that sensation ourselves, we took another train and went on north for a day and a night, and still another day. In a few weeks' time the trains were to be crowded with people coming to work in the copperfields, but after we had passed Victoria very few travellers accompanied us. Most of those who did were colonial Belgians, bound for the Congo.

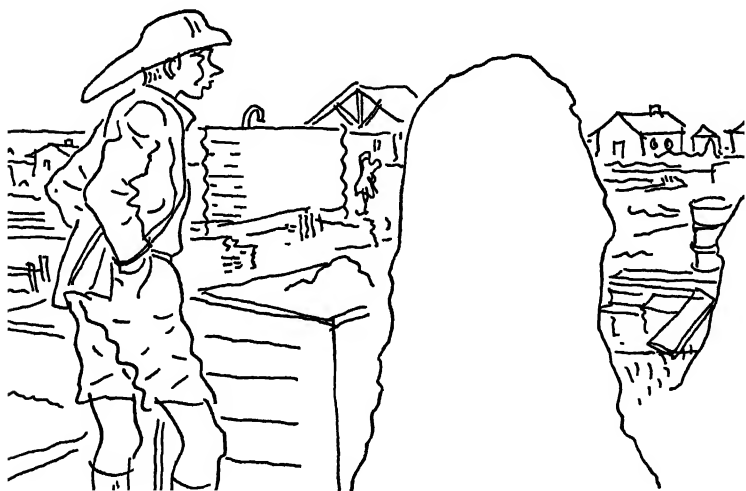
Even when we stopped now, at increasingly long intervals, there was little to look at but a signboard, a bare space cleared around a small shed, and an unpaved street or so, lined with low, box-like, tin-roofed houses. On the signboards were unfamiliar African names: Kalomo, Choma, Pemba, Monze, Kafue,

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Lusaka, Chisamba. Staring out at those boards and their scant surrounding signs of civilization, it was hard to believe that this, the railway strip, was the part of Northern Rhodesia most thickly populated by Europeans.

Practically every male European we saw was dressed in khaki shorts, knee-length stockings, a shirt and a sun helmet. Almost every woman wore a white cotton frock, a terai—a head-gear composed of two felt hats, one fitted inside the other—or a sun helmet, and often a veil. The men's faces were brick red, the women, who evidently gave more thought to the matter of complexion, were pale or sallow. It did not take us long to find out that the Rhodesian sun produces a nice tan far less often than it does an unhappily parboiled or leathery effect. As a preliminary step, it promptly takes the pink out of even an English girl's cheeks. Malaria is apt to add a dash of yellow.

Vehicles drawn up at the stations were usually ox wagons, or the half-ton lorries known in the country as vanettes. Once



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we were electrified by the vision of a stately dowager perched in a sort of box, which was painted a bright red, mounted on two high yellow wheels, and drawn by a pair of black boys in white tunics and red sashes. This, we learned from a fellow passenger, was a bush cart, a type of conveyance which had been popular among the earliest Northern Rhodesian pioneers.



The natives congregated at the stations here had darker skins and a great deal less animation than those we had glimpsed in Bechuanaland. These made no attempt to sell us anything, but squatted or lay prone on the ground, looking as if they had nothing under heaven to do, and an eternity in which to do it. Sometimes it was almost too much trouble to roll a pair of round eyes up at the train.

During the interminable hours between stops, trees continued to march backwards in monotonous, uninterrupted procession. In the neighbourhood of the Broken Hill lead and zinc mine, a hundred miles from the copperfields, we entered



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the central African termite belt, a fact plainly advertised by the appearance among the trees of cone-shaped anthills, ranging in height from a few inches to twenty or thirty feet. Save for this added feature, which soon lost its novelty through constant repetition, the same strip of scenery, revolving on an endless belt, might have accompanied us from Bulawayo.

It was mid-afternoon of the second day when we reached Ndola, the last stop before the train would cross into the Congo. Chiwalla's village, which had figured in the discovery of the Roan twenty-six years before, had once stood where Ndola stands today; the development of the copperfields was later to turn the town into a flourishing railway, shopping, and business centre.

When we clambered stiffly from the train that September afternoon in 1928, Ndola was a government and a customs station, and little else. Along one dusty road were strung half a dozen shops, a bank, a hotel, a combination postal and telegraph office, a doctor's office, the government boma, a few dwelling houses, and a recreation club, flanked by a nine hole golf course and two or three tennis courts.

The shadows were beginning to lengthen when we came, after a final motor trip, to our destination—to the Roan, where only a rutted, winding bush road and a slender telegraph wire connected us, via a tiny Rhodesia-Congo border customs station, with the outside world.



## *Prelude to Discovery*

BEFORE TELLING how young William Collier discovered the Roan orebody twenty-six years before it was put into development, I must go briefly much farther back, for copper was an old story in Africa, long before it became a white man's story.

It is more than four hundred years now, since the earliest Portuguese explorers noticed copper bracelets on the arms of natives on the African coast. Two centuries later, the first Europeans to cross the lower part of the continent wrote that inland natives traded malachite, a copper mineral, for cloth and other goods, that copper was smelted and sold in bars from the Katanga district of what is now the Congo. David Livingstone, exploring south central Africa in the middle of the last century, spoke frequently in his diaries of an immense and ancient copper industry, which he believed to be closely connected with the slave traffic between the east and west coasts.

A great many intriguing questions arise in connection with this ancient industry, the answers to which are lost with the rest of Africa's lost past. Did ancestors of the natives we know see the mineral outcropping from the ground, visualize

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its possibilities, and work out a method for smelting it? Or was it other natives, who have since vanished from the face of the earth? Or was the whole activity inaugurated by visitors from another continent—perhaps those same mysterious visitors who are thought by some to have built the Great Zimbabwe, and the other structures whose ruins lie like a stone belt across lower Africa? Africans themselves have no answers to these questions—a Congo chief once told an explorer that Lesa, the Almighty, endowed men at the beginning of time with a knowledge of the working of metals.

Excavations—some of them in the Congo very large ones—and the ruins of old smelters have been found recently in the south central African bush. These bear out Livingstone's description of a former native activity in copper, but present a sharp contrast to that activity as it existed when white prospecting became general in the country. Prospectors then found that, though natives were still obtaining copper, evidently scraping it or breaking it off in small pieces from outcrops of copper-bearing rock, they were using it chiefly for medicinal purposes; actual<sup>†</sup> smelting was being done only occasionally. The tale of a black man's copper industry was running out as the white man's began.

Considering the evidence with which he had been confronted for so long, the white man was extraordinarily slow in getting off to his start. South central Africa was still wild and formidable country, of course; the first prospectors to venture into it were too busy looking for gold to bother with a less spectacular metal.

During the closing years of the Nineteenth Century, King Leopold of Belgium established the Congo Free State; and

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the British South Africa Company, launched by Rhodes, concluded a series of treaties with native chiefs who ruled over the land to the immediate south, bringing this land into the Empire as Northern Rhodesia. A Crown Charter gave the South Africa Company responsibilities of government in Northern Rhodesia, and control of mineral rights.

The gold fever, bred on the incredible Johannesburg Reef, was subsiding now, making way, in the newly annexed territories, for an investigation of other mineral resources. Rhodes, his always lively imagination fired by Livingstone's diaries, is said to have done a great deal to arouse a special interest in copper.

Prospecting for copper in Northern Rhodesia began in the region where the Kafue River, from flowing south, swings around in a wide curve to the east. The land enclosed in the river bend is known as the Hook of the Kafue. Pieces of copper had been seen in the hands of native inhabitants of the Hook; a missionary had reported that smelting was being done here by members of a local tribe. One prospector, whose persuasive powers must have been considerable, had actually got a tribesman to show him some old workings in the vicinity, and he himself had unearthed a few more. These particular discoveries were exploited by a British enterprise called the Northern Copper Company. By the time the Twentieth Century was two years old, however, development work had proven none of them to be extensive or very valuable. They certainly did not account for an immense and ancient industry; there must, obviously, be a great deal more copper in some other locality.

The discovery of a spectacularly rich orebody in the southern

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Congo prompted the Northern Copper Company to send a prospector up to search the Northern Rhodesian territory lying near the Congo border.

It may seem odd that white men found it necessary to search for a mineral that natives had been using so long. Surely any prospector who was neither deaf nor dumb could find a copper deposit at once, through the simple process of asking a black man where it was.

A great many prospectors, however, had asked this precise question a great many times, but only one, so far—the persuasive gentleman in the Hook of the Kafue—had succeeded in eliciting an answer. That he had succeeded was, actually, far more remarkable than that the others had failed. Northern Rhodesia had produced no parallel to the bitter antagonism between the Southern Rhodesian settlers and the Matabele; none of the tribes up here had shown active hostility to the comparatively few Europeans who had come into the country. Neither, however, had their attitude been confiding. No African willingly imparts even trivial information to an alien; on a subject to which importance is attached, the Sphinx would be as communicative.

The cessation of smelting by no means argued that the importance of copper was lessened in native eyes. It was, for one thing, the chief local remedy for the tropical ulcers with which so many black limbs were afflicted. Above all, there was the matter of ownership to be considered, in a land where possessions had long been held on a communal basis. The location of a natural resource was a secret belonging to the whole tribe in whose land it lay; the member who betrayed a tribal secret

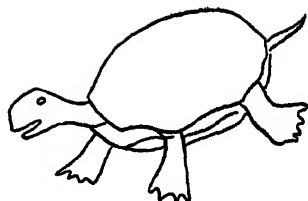
ran the risk of an abrupt encounter with tribal justice. Not, as a rule, a pleasant encounter . . .

But if men can keep the secrets of a land, the land itself can sometimes keep them even more effectively. Congo copper might stand up for all to see in 'hills of green stone,' but little stood up in the neighbouring territory to the south except the giant anthills and the countless trees. Searching the vast, flat floor of the Northern Rhodesian bush for an inconspicuous outcrop of copper-bearing rock ranked, as an activity, with looking for a needle in a haystack.

The best chance of finding it lay, in spite of their reticence, with the natives, who at least were human, who at least had tongues which even they, occasionally, neglected to guard. Every prospector loaded several of his carriers with boxes of bright beads and big bundles of calico, which he hoped might help to loosen some of those tongues.

For the task of prospecting the practically virgin territory lying between the upper reaches of the Kafue River and the long Congo toe, the Northern Copper Company selected a young Englishman who was already in their employ. Beside prospecting talents, this young man had exhibited a knack for picking up the innumerable dialects of the country, an ability to get along amicably with the people who spoke those dialects.

It was close to the middle of the 1902 dry season when William Collier put down the development tools he had been using on a small prospect in the Hook of the Kafue, and started to follow the river toward its northern source.



## Gentlemen's Agreement



TWO WEEKS of walking brought young Collier and his half dozen native carriers to Kapopo, one of the scattered administration bomas established by the British South Africa Company. The little prospect on the lower Kafue lay about a hundred and fifty miles to the southwest; to the immediate north and east spread the region in which Collier was to conduct his search for copper. It was a large, uncharted region, and Collier sought the advice of the District Commissioner stationed at Kapopo, as to how he might best make his start.

The Commissioner suggested heading toward a village which was situated near the end of the Congo toe, and which was known, in honour of the chief who made it his home, as 'Chiwalla's.'

Chiwalla, the Commissioner explained, was not the usual African chief. He was an Arab, who had once been a slave-trader. Forced to abandon that lucrative profession, Chiwalla had philosophically settled down to enjoy his retirement in Northern Rhodesia. He exerted a strong influence over his large and unique collection of villagers, some of whom were

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African, some Arab, some mixed, but all of whom professed the Mohammedan faith.

The Commissioner, whose multiple duties included a periodic tour of the district under his supervision, recalled having once seen at Chiwalla's, among the usual earthenware and iron cooking utensils, one or two bowls made of copper. Chiwalla, being a travelled gentleman, might of course have brought the bowls in from outside, just as he had introduced into his Northern Rhodesian village the unusual culture of rice. But in case the copper emanated from a local source, and provided they knew where that source was, the Commissioner was of the opinion that Chiwalla or some of his people might be induced, more readily than members of an orthodox native tribe, to talk. Chiwalla's former business, the Commissioner said, had left him with a mind which was always open to suggestions of a trade.

The Commissioner's advice struck Collier as sound, and he determined to act upon it forthwith. Even if the trip to the village itself should prove unfruitful, it would at least take him well into the region he was to explore, and so at worst would not involve any wasted effort. When he had, with the Commissioner's help, prepared a sketch map of the route to Chiwalla's, Collier told his capitao, or head carrier, to prepare for an early start next day. But an incident occurred that same afternoon which not only delayed the projected departure from Kapopo, but was to modify Collier's whole course of action.

While the carriers were packing, the young prospector walked out a short distance from the boma to inspect a small rock outcrop of which the Commissioner had spoken. He found in



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the outcrop no trace of copper; going on a little way, he presently picked up a footpath, which wandered eventually into a small native village. As he followed the path around the curving side of a village hut, Collier almost stumbled over a black man who was seated on the ground, absorbed in the business of scraping dust from a piece of rock. The dust he was allowing to fall on an open sore on his leg. The sight brought Collier to a standstill as effectively as if he had been jerked by a string. He was familiar with the native use of malachite dust for treating tropical ulcers; a single glance at the rock in the native's hand assured him that it was copiously stained with malachite, the same copper mineral of which explorers in south central Africa had written so long ago. There rose in Collier's breast the feeling of excitement which holds prospectors, the world over, to an often sadly discouraging calling.

The emotion now betrayed the young man into committing an indiscretion. Without any preliminaries, he asked where the rock had come from. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than he would have liked to recall them. He knew that the African conversational approach is always indirect, and that even if copper were a perfectly open subject for general discussion, this was not the proper way to introduce it.

He was not, therefore, altogether surprised to learn that the proprietor of the rock had no idea where it came from. No, he had not obtained it for himself; it had been given him by a friend. As to where the friend was now, who could say? He did not live in this village, nor anywhere near it. Well, it would really be difficult to say just where he did live.

The friend, Collier concluded, lived solely in the realm of the speaker's imagination, whence he had been summoned

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to avoid the necessity for a blunt refusal to answer the original question.

Hoping that he might yet retrieve his own blunder, Collier allowed no trace of scepticism to tinge his manner as he remarked what a pity it was that the friend was so far away. He might, if he had only been here to show where he had found the rock, have become the owner of a generous length of very fine calico. Collier drew a scrap of the material from his pocket as he spoke; to allow its qualities time to make their impression, he dropped it with a casual gesture on the top of a nearby stump.

A few minutes of complete silence went by, during which Collier, over the prolonged lighting of his pipe, was pleased to observe that the calico was receiving a narrow, if oblique, scrutiny from the pair of eyes below him. A careful air of detachment from anything in his immediate surroundings covered the owner of the eyes like a cloak, when he remarked at last that he had suffered for many years from a very bad memory. It was, he added, an unhappy affliction, since it had more than once caused him to appear before his fellows in the rôle of a positive noodle.

Feeling his way into what seemed a promising opening, Collier agreed that too much forgetfulness could indeed be a great trial. Take this rock, the man went on presently, in the manner of one who seeks to prove an interesting but purely academic conversational point. This rock was a fine example of the way his memory often behaved. Why, the recollection had just this moment come back to him that the rock had not been given him by a friend at all. The friend had indeed given him something; the gift had been received the same day he himself had fetched the rock home, and the two happenings

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must somehow have got mixed up in his mind later on. The Bwana, perhaps, he concluded on a slightly more anxious note, could see how such a thing could take place in the mind of one whose memory from childhood had been bad?

Collier replied gravely that he could quite see. In a few moments he ventured to wonder aloud just how memory stood on the question of where the rock had come from. Memory, it seemed, was even now wrestling with that very problem, though the exact location of the place was still a trifle hazy. Collier was only momentarily chagrined by this piece of news; his cue reached him almost at once in the absent but steady gaze the other now directed at the tree stump.

Collier hastened to announce that he himself forgot things sometimes, too. For instance, he had quite forgotten at first just how many yards of calico he had like the piece on the stump over there; but now the figure had come back to him clearly. He held up both hands and spread all his fingers twice. A few minutes later he was exhilarated to learn that the other's last mental hurdle had been safely cleared, and that in return for twenty yards of calico, he was prepared to lead the way to the source of malachite.

Collier would have liked to set out at once, but, aware of the African's intense dislike of being hurried, he did not press the point. After some debate, a plan to start at sunrise on the day after tomorrow was agreed upon. Congratulating himself on his luck in having any such plan agreed upon at all, Collier returned to camp to put off the departure for Chiwalla's.

The trees and anthills still had a ghostly look about them when he arrived two mornings later at the appointed rendezvous. Peering eagerly about him, Collier thought for a time



that he saw the thin figure of his guide in every shadow, but presently it was broad daylight, and still no guide had come. The sun was well up when Collier was forced to the exasperated conclusion that he was not coming at all.

Nor was he, when the prospector went there on the slender chance of finding him, to be seen anywhere in his village. The half dozen men who now squatted, immobile as so many black statues, in the shade of the single tree in the centre of the small clearing, disclaimed all knowledge of his whereabouts.

‘It may be that he has gone away, Bwana,’ was the most satisfactory reply Collier could elicit. ‘Who knows?’

Whether the talk of the other afternoon had been overheard, whether there was a sinister implication in that ‘gone away,’ it was impossible, from the impassive faces of these men, to tell. Collier saw nothing to be gained by asking them about the malachite. If they knew what he wanted and had recently dealt with someone who had intended to help him find it, they certainly would not answer. If, on the other hand, the first

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man had simply changed his mind and gone away to avoid embarrassing explanations, it did not seem quite sporting to let the others know what he had thought of doing. The others, Collier decided, did not look like a particularly agreeable lot.

He set out for Chiwalla's without wasting any more time on what was, any way you looked at it, a futile business.

On the second day out of Kapopo he shot a hippopotamus. Shooting to feed his entourage was part of a prospector's job in those days; the march was halted so that the meat might be cut up and apportioned among the carriers. Collier's knife, thrust into the flesh just under the hippo's thick hide, suddenly encountered something hard. This, upon investigation, proved to be a bullet, which had evidently been embedded there for some little time.

As he stood, turning the small object over in his hand, and watched disapprovingly by the carriers, who were anxious for the cutting-up process to be completed, Collier experienced a renewed surge of the excitement that had risen in him when he saw the piece of malachite. For this was a rather unusual bullet. It was of the crude type fashioned by black hands, and the material of which it was made was copper.

When Collier went on, though he continued in a generally northeast direction, he no longer headed straight for Chiwalla's. Two pieces of copper found so close together surely meant that the source of supply could not be far away, and that the natives living in this neighbourhood all knew where it was.

Maintaining a sharp lookout for signs of the metal in the ground over which he passed, Collier used the trading of beads and calico for eggs, monkey nuts and other local produce, as an excuse to ramble from village to village to talk with the in-

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habitants and to establish friendly relations with them. In pursuit of this last policy he allowed the villagers to drive excellent bargains in produce—just excellent enough to avoid arousing their suspicion or contempt. Whenever he saw a baby with the sore eyes so common among infants of the country, he brought out his medicine kit and showed the mother how to apply a healing ointment. He had another remedy ready for the ever-present tropical ulcer. He shot a great many antelope, too, because he knew that *nyama*, game, will sometimes find the way to a black man's heart when everything else fails.

His approach to his subject now was cautious enough to satisfy the most rigid rules of African etiquette. The weather, the crops, a dozen other topics of local interest were exhausted before he worked around to the point of taking the copper bullet from his pocket and intimating his own interest in the question of where the metal had come from. He was careful to mention the matter to only one man at a time, thus giving anyone who might feel inclined to help him a chance to do so in secret.

And he found out exactly nothing. Each time the point was reached and the subject of copper touched on at last, Collier saw come over each black face the look which everyone who deals with the people of Africa comes, sooner or later, to know only too well. It is a peculiar, closed look; achieved without the perceptible movement of a facial muscle, the effect is quite as definite as if its wearer had gone into another room and shut the door behind him. It means that there is no use in pursuing any farther the subject that called it up.

Though the look accompanying the process remained the



same, individual methods of evading an answer to Collier's question varied widely. One man suddenly failed to understand speech to which he had responded for an hour with perfect ease. Another parried the question with one of his own—was it likely that a poor man who had never had his hands on a gun would know anything about how a bullet was made? Another succumbed hastily to an acute pain in his stomach; still another remembered that he had pressing business to attend to elsewhere.

Several men, with an air of engaging frankness, assured Collier that the copper in the bullet had come from the Katanga district of the Congo. This, Collier knew, was a possibility, but it was not a certainty. The chief thing that made him doubt it was that odd, secretive look. With nothing to conceal, why should so many of these people wear it? Collier would not have been sent on this trip if he had not been known to possess both patience and tenacity; he set his jaw stubbornly and went on his slow way from village to village

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Presently he came on a group of huts in the hands of whose occupants he saw not one, but several small pieces of rock like the piece he had seen at Kapopo. Carefully showing no interest in those pieces of rock, Collier decided that he would not move on again until he had learned something definite about their origin. Surely, somewhere, the armour of African reserve must have a weak spot, somewhere it must eventually crack under pressure. Here, where a number of people were putting malachite dust on their repulsive, festering sores, was a good place to bring concentrated pressure to bear.

Collier pitched his camp outside the village and settled down to what he realized was going to be a long siege.

The plan of action he mapped out for himself featured an extensive shooting trip every day. This would enable him unobtrusively to conduct his own search for copper in the surrounding bush, while he devoted the remainder of his time to winning the confidence and good will of the villagers. He did not intend to say anything about copper this time until the way to it was well paved.

At the end of a fortnight his efforts in the village seemed to be rewarded. Two members of the local community came to his tent one morning and asked if the Bwana would settle a dispute between them. It was a highly complicated affair, going back in its origin to a marriage settlement made over a woman who was now a bent and shrivelled crone. A great many of the other villagers took sides in the ensuing discussion; Collier listened through a long day to an inexhaustible exposition of the endless pros and cons. When he finally gave his decision, his audience was so impressed by its wisdom and justice that others hastened to follow the example of the two



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men. Collier shortly found himself the recognized arbiter of disputes of a sort usually laid before a tribal chief.

It was a unique position for a white man, other than a government administrator, to hold, and Collier's hopes were justifiably high when he at last began again to put his questions about copper . . .

Sitting in his tent just before sunset on an evening some ten days later, Collier disgustedly made up his mind to move on. He hated to admit defeat; he hated to leave a place where he had seen so much of the copper, but there didn't seem to be any use in staying longer. He had covered a wide circle of bush around the village without finding anything; his efforts in the village itself had proven no more successful. Putting his questions about copper lately, he had met the same old denial, evasion, failure to understand, had seen the familiar tight-shut look come over one black face after another—faces that had at first been so open and friendly. It began to look as if there were, after all, no vulnerable spot in Africa's armour, or at least as if William Collier were not going to find it.

Well, there was still Chiwalla's to try. Collier got out his compass and map, and began to work out his present position in relation to the Arab's village.

Was it a movement that attracted his attention, or the mere ghost of a sound? Glancing up from his study of the map, Collier was startled to see a dark figure squatting on the ground just outside the opening of his tent.

The prospector had come to know most of the people in the village by name; this, he recognized, was Musala, an infinitely wrinkled ancient, who had been a silent but constant attendant at Collier's impromptu court sessions. Without a

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glance at the face to help him, Collier could have identified his visitor by the degree to which the latter possessed his race's capacity for keeping still.

Though Musala had patently arrived at the tent during the last few moments, a permanent quality in his squat now gave the impression that he might have been born precisely where he was, and might eventually be expected to die there. Glancing at him from time to time during the open air court proceedings, Collier had thought more than once that Musala, seated, his thin loins wrapped in a narrow strip of bark cloth, could easily pass for an idol carved in the same dark wood of which beams in the Dutch houses down at Cape Town were made.

'What does the old boy want?' wondered Collier, as he stared at the motionless profile now presented to his view. Suddenly his heart began to beat a little faster, as a possible answer to his own question flashed across his mind.

Musala, he reflected, would hardly have come alone if he had a dispute to be arbitrated; opponents in an argument invariably came in pairs. They always came in the morning, too, when a whole day could be filled with their interminable debate. The village drums, moreover, were sounding tonight; a general celebration of some sort was plainly in progress. It looked as if Musala had something rather special on his mind; it looked as if he didn't want his own people to know of his visit to the prospector's camp. He wouldn't want them to know, of course, if it had anything to do with copper. Collier had never questioned Musala on the subject, but the latter could easily have heard of his questioning of others. The weakest feature of the sort of campaign he was conduct-

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ing lay, Collier well knew, in the rapidity with which word of a white man's doings could spread among natives.

Aware of the behaviour proper to one receiving a call, Collier let a few more minutes elapse in silence, though his caller was seated within a scant two yards of his own elbow. He was glad, for once, of the prolonged pause demanded by convention, for it gave him a chance to control the hopeful elation with which he was filled before he gave Musala the salutation befitting his years.

'Mutende, my father. You are seen.'

Only Musala's head and hands moved, the former to turn courteously toward his host, the latter to clap softly together in greeting.

'I am seen, Bwana. And the Bwana is also seen. Mutende, Bwana.'

An hour passed in desultory talk before the object of the call finally emerged. The prospector's heart sank as Musala, having indicated by a subtle but unmistakable shading of tone that he was now dealing with the matter which had brought him, delivered himself of a long speech.

He was, said Musala, as the Bwana could plainly see, an old man. But though his teeth were not all they once had been, his belly still cried out loudly for *nyama*. He had seen the fine *nyama* the Bwana had brought into the village, but since he himself was only a transient, resting in the village on his way to his own home, and since he had nothing to trade with the villagers for *nyama*, he had not tasted any of it. He had ventured to come to the Bwana tonight in the hope that the latter would take pity on an old man whose belly was empty, and would shoot some *nyama* for him especially. A duiker,

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perhaps, or an oribi, since the meat of these smaller antelope was tender and succulent. But Musala, the Bwana was to understand, wasn't too particular about duiker or oribi—any nyama, really, would do.

The sharpness of his disappointment had almost brought a curt refusal of Musala's rather cheeky request from Collier when he was suddenly struck by another aspect of the situation. Was the request, after all, so cheeky—was it, in short, a request at all? Africans were accustomed to obtaining things through barter—Musala had taken it as a matter of course that the villagers would not give meat to an outsider who had nothing to offer in exchange; the villagers, on their own initiative had scrupulously supplied Collier's camp with produce in return for the meat they had received. It was most unusual altogether, for a black man to ask for or expect to receive an outright present. And one too poor in worldly goods to get nyama from his own people might still drive an obvious bargain with a white prospector.

Collier was familiar enough with the methods of Africa to realize that the omission of any direct mention of copper would be quite in line with what he now felt convinced that Musala was proposing to do—to exchange his tribe's carefully guarded secret for a piece of venison.

Following the lead he had been given, Collier showed no sign of awareness that anything unusual was on foot. He even managed a creditable show of hesitation before he agreed to comply with the old man's request.

'My Bwana,' murmured Musala. Clapping his hands softly together again, he rose in a single motion from his squat, and vanished soundlessly into the night.

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Collier shot Musala's duiker the following afternoon.

For three days thereafter nothing happened, beyond that Musala presumably ate some of his *nyama*, and plainly hung the rest of it up to dry in the sun, against the day when he would take it with him to his own village.

Three inactive days might have been expected to weaken Collier's rapidly formed belief that a pact had been proposed by the old native and accepted by himself. Quite an opposite reaction, however, took place in his mind. He encountered his friend from time to time in the village, and though Musala's face expressed nothing, and the only words the two exchanged were those of a brief, formal greeting, it seemed to Collier on each occasion that a silent word of reassurance had been given and received.

He waited with an easy mind and a not too restless body for Musala's next move.

It came on the morning of the fourth day, in a message delivered by Collier's *capitao*. Musala sent word that he was leaving the village at once to return home. He knew, ran the message, that the Bwana was on his way to Chiwalla's village, which, as it happened, lay in the same general direction as his own. If the Bwana by chance should wish to resume his journey to Chiwalla's on the following morning, he, Musala, would be glad to join the Bwana's party and act as guide, since he knew the whole country hereabouts very well. He was meanwhile starting a day early, in order to collect some medicinal herbs he wanted to take home with him. The remainder of the message comprised a minute description of the point on the route to Chiwalla's at which Musala would wait for Collier's party to overtake him.

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If Collier had needed any further reassurance, Musala's elaborate ruse to keep the villagers from seeing him leave in the company of the white man would have supplied it. The herb story was apparently introduced to allay the suspicions of the carriers, though the latter, hailing from a now distant district, could be safely presumed to lack any strong personal interest in local affairs.

'But the foxy old boy's taking no chances,' thought Collier, suppressing an appreciative grin as he gave orders to break camp for an early morning start. He had not forgotten the somewhat similar appointment another man had once made with him, but the memory had no power to disturb his present peace of mind. Musala's case was entirely different from that other fellow's; in the acceptance of the *nyama* Musala had pledged himself to a definite course of action. Collier went to sleep wondering if the copper deposit lay far outside the circle he himself had already described around the village.

Musala was squatting in his familiar attitude under the wild fig tree he had designated to the *capitao*, when the prospecting party reached the spot next day. Ostentatiously gathering up the handful of withered herbs that lay at his feet, he rose and joined the march. Collier observed that he had brought none of his dried meat with him after all.

'Probably traded it with the villagers for that junk,' the young man thought idly, glancing at the gourds, the broken knife, the fragments of iron, and the assortment of small parcels tied up in bark cloth that depended from Musala's neck by varying lengths of bark string. 'Having something to trade for once must have bucked the old boy no end.'

Musala's age, which Collier judged to be between seventy-

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five and eighty, at once reduced progress to a slow crawl, through country from which several months of seasonal drought had drained most of the vitality. The thin, dusty foliage of the parched bush trees offered scant protection from the hard glare of a sun set in a cloudless sky; in the open dambos, or glades, visible waves of heat shimmered unpleasantly over the blackened stubble of burned-off grass. Musala led the way across a river that had shrunk to the proportions of a stream, across beds of streams from which all trace of water had vanished.

Though the young man took care now to make frequent opportunities for Musala to speak to him alone, a day went by with no word from the guide, no suggestion of a shift in the route they were following, which Collier, watching his map, knew was leading directly toward Chiwalla's.

As hour followed hour on the second day, and again on the third, and still Musala did not speak, the high spirits in which he had set out from the village began gradually to desert the prospector, and he found himself, for the first time since he had left the Hook of the Kafue, growing restive and irritable. The heat, which he had scarcely noticed before, began to oppress him, the short steps to which he was obliged to adjust his long legs made his muscles ache, and set up in his nerves a counter urge to hurry—an urge that seemed to Collier to grow momentarily more intense.

It was a thoroughly irked young man who pitched his third camp on the bank of a stream which had managed to retain a modest flow of water. Sitting down to his solitary supper, Collier had almost made up his mind to send for Musala and ask him point-blank just when he intended to say something

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about the object of the journey. But he felt better with the food inside him, and decided to give the old man a little more time in which to do things his own way.

'If he doesn't take too damned long about it,' he supplemented gloomily a few minutes later, as he lost the flame of half a dozen matches, trying, with not very steady fingers, to light his pipe.

Looking up from the completed task, he experienced the momentary illusion of being back at the last village again. There was Musala, squatting, just as he had squatted before, outside the open flap of the tent.

The impatience that had grown so strong in him during the last three days made it hard for Collier to refrain from acknowledging his visitor's presence at once this time; but he conscientiously forced himself to count fifty, slowly, before he spoke. The inevitable exchange of small talk that followed was never anything but a confused blur in his mind afterward; while it lasted, it held the nightmare quality of something that will never reach an end.

Listening with painful concentration to hear the significant note creep into Musala's voice, Collier thought, when it finally came, that something must have gone wrong with his own ears, that he must during the day have unconsciously suffered a touch of sun. He could not have spent the last—what was it anyway, a century?—waiting to hear what he was hearing now; the thing simply wasn't possible.

He was hearing that the party had reached the point where the way to Musala's home diverged from the way to Chiwalla's. He was hearing that Musala had come to say good-bye to the Bwana tonight, because he would be gone on his own way



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before the Bwana would be ready to move on to Chiwalla's in the morning.

Musala's speech was followed by a long pause, during which Collier's mind first had to recover from what had taken it like a powerful blow in the physical solar plexus. Not even in his unease of the last three days had the prospector entertained a doubt of the old native's intention to take him to a deposit of copper; it was, he saw now, only because he had been so confident that he was at last drawing close to his goal that his desire to push on toward it faster had grown so urgent.

In the anger that came as his second reaction, he stared down at his hands and told himself that he could not very well clench them around the neck of an eighty-year-old native, even when the owner of that neck had let him down so badly.

Forcing himself, finally, to go back over the whole sequence of events, beginning with Musala's original call at his other camp, Collier began to see that he actually had no grounds whatever on which to accuse the old man of duplicity. The only definite statement the latter had ever made was the one expressing a desire for nyama. His arranging to come on this trip could be quite easily explained by a simple wish for more nyama. Collier recalled how Musala had stepped out from under the fig tree with his gewgaws around his neck and none of his dried meat in his hands. Of course he hadn't brought dried meat when he had known he could get all the fresh he wanted from the antelope Collier shot along the way. And the herb-gathering Collier had considered such a smart move—hell, natives used all sorts of herbs for their aches and pains and their tropical ulcers; they were always using herbs—when they weren't using malachite dust!

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A wry smile twisted the young man's lips as he admitted at last that the joke was on him; he had simply read a meaning he had wanted to see into Musala's decidedly cheeky conduct. It was no doubt part of the joke that he couldn't, even now, get rid of the stubborn feeling that between Musala and himself there *had* existed a definite understanding, that Musala had honestly intended to show him a deposit of copper.

Collier's eyes, during the last few minutes, had been absently following the movements of a small dry stick which Musala had picked up, and with which he was now tracing an aimless design in the dust at his feet. A sense of there being something wrong with what he was looking at tickled the surface of the prospector's absorbed mind for several moments before the nature of the discrepancy occurred to him.

Musala never moved a muscle unless he had to; Musala, of course, ought to be sitting perfectly still . . .

Suddenly Collier's gaze at the stick became intent, and he sat forward with a jerk that almost caused his camp chair to collapse beneath him. Those weren't aimless marks Musala was making, or idle movements. The old man had just hesitated, had carefully patted out a line with the palm of his hand, and now was busy replacing it with another. Collier's dawning smile widened to a jubilant grin as he realized that what Musala was doing was drawing a map.

Presently the map was finished, and its originator began to speak. If, when the Bwana went on tomorrow, he were to follow the bank of this stream beside which they now sat, so, he would come to a clearing that ran through the bush, so. The clearing, according to the drawing, was long and narrow, and doubled back abruptly on itself, like a horseshoe. It crossed

the stream twice, at right angles. If the Bwana were to look at such and such a spot in the clearing, went on Musala, pointing with his stick, it was possible that he might find something.

Collier wanted to jump up and shout, to slap his friend enthusiastically on his remarkably straight back. Good old Musala—who was straight in other places, too; who hadn't, after all, let a fellow down!

He confined himself, with admirable restraint, to saying that in the event he did find something, he would give Musala a bolt of his best calico, provided the old man would tell him where he could be located later on. Collier had two reasons for making this offer. He really wanted to reward Musala if he did indeed find what he was looking for. And Musala's reaction to the offer of calico would be the final test of whether or not he were acting in good faith. Collier had no real doubt of this, but a remnant of caution lingered from the uncomfortable minutes he had just come through.

The care with which Musala pointed out the exact anthill near where they now sat, beside which he would wait for his calico on the appointed day, assured Collier that he was not *being sent on a wild-goose chase*.

The only remaining question concerned the accuracy of the map and directions. Collier would have liked to retain Musala's services as guide, but he understood too well why the old man did not want to come the rest of the way to even suggest that he should do so. Parting from Collier here, he could—and Collier knew that he always would, if the question ever came up—stoutly deny having shown the place to a white man. Just as he could maintain, with equally literal truth, that the word 'copper' had never once passed between them.

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Collier imitated the other's casual air, as he moved a foot forward and helped rub from the ground the only concrete piece of evidence connecting Musala with the secret of his tribe.

Collier set a smart pace for his carriers next morning, now that he had, at long last, something definite toward which to hurry. A wide dambo, thickly studded with small grey ant-hills, flanked the stream Musala had told him to follow; for the sake of the comparative shade and the smoother footing, Collier kept under the trees at the edge of the bush. In the early afternoon he shortened his steps a little. The salient points of Musala's map were clear in his mind; he should be drawing fairly close now to his destination.

At about four o'clock the bush in front of him began to thin out. In an open space a little way ahead, Collier caught sight of a herd of roan antelope, which, unaware of the down-wind approach of danger, was grazing placidly. Mindful of the necessity for providing his party with food, Collier crept cautiously forward a few paces, aimed at a big bull and brought it down with one shot.

When he led his gratified carriers up to the spot in the clearing, the young man at once lost all interest in his kill, though it was an unusually fine specimen of roan, bearing a magnificent pair of horns.

For the bull lay on some jagged rocks that protruded slightly from the ground. In several of the rocks appeared shallow holes, of the sort scraped out by the rude tools of natives. Where they had been scraped, Collier saw that the rocks were profusely stained with malachite . . .

While the prospector pegged his claims and examined the rest of the clearing, one of his carriers wandered off into the

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bush, and was either lost, or absorbed in the charms of some local belle, for almost a week. To prevent the unforeseen delay from making him disappoint Musala, Collier sent a runner on the appointed day to the spot where they had agreed to meet. The runner carried with him fifty yards of gaily patterned calico.

Two days later Collier was astonished to see Musala himself walk into camp. His first thought was that the runner, who was to take some letters on to Kapopo after delivering the calico, must somehow have missed the appointment with the old man. Knowing the latter's genius for the indirect conveyance of ideas, Collier refrained from asking questions, and waited with interest to see how the present delicate situation would be handled.

Musala opened the conversation by announcing that he was on his way to visit one of his married daughters. He then went on to speak of purely casual matters, never once, Collier observed, allowing his glance to stray toward the copper-stained rock, close to which Collier's tent was pitched. In a few minutes his visitor surprised Collier again, by remarking that he had lately come into possession of a fine piece of calico, with which he was very much pleased.

Collier, expressing suitably impersonal interest in this bit of news, wondered, in view of it, what on earth the other could have on his mind now.

He was enlightened when Musala, with the subtle change in tone which announced, as plainly as if a gong had been struck, the introduction of the really serious matter in hand, said that he had been thinking a great deal about the Bwana

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lately, and that he hoped everything had gone well with him on his current trip.

Perhaps Collier only imagined that Musala's eyes rested now for a fleeting moment on the rock outcrop; but even without the aid of that brief reference, he understood at last why the old man had come. Musala had wanted to make sure that Collier, too, was pleased with the outcome of their bargain; he had wanted, in a definite expression of mutual satisfaction, to put a formal end to an episode.

' . . . Go in peace, my father.'

'I go, Bwana. And may the Bwana remain in peace.'

'Good old Musala!' A smile of amiable amusement was on Collier's face as he watched the black man, his mind reassured and his person happily laden with several generous chunks of fresh *nyama*, make off into the bush. In spite of the remark about a visit to a daughter, Musala was plainly going back the same way he had come.

This was, as far as the white race is concerned, Musala's final exit.

Those following the development of the Rhodesian copper-fields have often remarked that it would be a point of historical interest to know the identity of the native who helped a prospector to the discovery of one of the mines, to know just where he came from, just who his descendants are.

I think it is better that these things are not known. Musala and Collier, black man and white, made an agreement there in the Rhodesian bush, an agreement without even words to bind it. If, in making his pact, Musala broke faith with his tribe, he kept it, scrupulously, with Collier.

## *Gentlemen's Agreement*

On the latter's part, above and beyond the payment of nyama or calico, lay a silent promise to allow a man who had sided against his own people to remain anonymous. The name 'Musala' is used here only because it is easier to use a name than it is to refer constantly, as the prospector in his reports referred briefly, to 'an old native.'

In that old native's lost identity lies incontrovertible proof that Collier, too, kept his unspoken word faithfully.

*'To your lost grave, my father, go in peace.'*

Yes, it is decidedly better so.

## ***The Bush***



DURING OUR STAY in Bulawayo on the way to the Roan, we had made our first acquaintance with a man who had lived in Northern Rhodesia for any length of time. He had done some prospecting and some professional hunting, and had lately run a trading store at Ndola. Now he was going back to England, to the small Sussex village whence he had originally come. He said, with an odd touch of almost angry defiance, that it was his second trip back home, and that this time he was going to stay . . .

Meeting someone who actually knew the copperfields district well struck me as a marvellous bit of luck; but my persistent efforts to pump detailed information from him were not very successful. Fluent enough on other subjects, he suddenly turned fumbling and inarticulate when he spoke of the country on which he was turning his back. He never spoke of it, I noticed, as anything but 'the bush.'

He did tell me one very definite thing, though, in the end. He said that I would either like the bush very much, or hate



## *The Bush*

it, and that which reaction I was to experience would very shortly become apparent to me.

'You'll know soon enough,' was his succinct phrasing of this thought.

He said something else about the bush, too, with a rather wry smile, just before we parted.

'If you don't like it, see that you don't wear *veldtschoen* when you go walking in it.'

We had seen *veldtschoen* in Johannesburg, originally the home-made shoes of the Dutch *voortrekkers*. They were flat-soled, with natural-coloured grey or brown uppers, cut to fit the foot from a piece of soft antelope hide. Though they were not particularly beautiful footgear, we had been told in South Africa that their lightness, durability, and comfort made them eminently practical for wear in the bush. (Our recent acquaintance was not the first we had heard employ this phrase in speaking of Northern Rhodesia. In using it here, I shall refer more specifically to the northwestern section surrounding the copperfields.)

'Why,' I now asked curiously, 'shouldn't I wear *veldtschoen*?'

Because, it seemed, of a saying among Rhodesian settlers. If you walk through the bush in *veldtschoen*, the bush lays hold of you, so that no matter how far away you go after that, you must always come back to walk through it again.

'Even,' I thought, suddenly enlightened, 'if you go as far as to a village in Sussex.'

And then in a little while we ourselves were in the copperfields, and the bush was no longer a rather queer term on the lips of a stranger, no longer a lot of rather boring scenery to

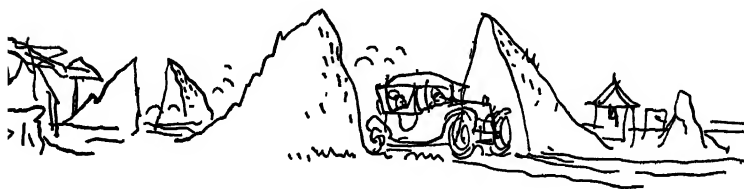
## Chapter Four

be viewed casually through the windows of a train. The bush had become the background of our personal lives.

I was surprised and a little let down to find, except for the narrow line of larger trees, tangled foliage, and an occasional row of palms, festooning the immediate banks of a river, so little look of the tropics in that background. It seemed odd that this should be so, when we were only thirteen degrees south of the equator—until you remembered that we were also on Africa's vast interior plateau, at an altitude of over four thousand feet above sea-level. It wasn't always an easy thing to remember, for on our long trip in the climb from the coast had been so gradual as to be almost imperceptible; and the country round about us now was too flat to convey any suggestion of height.

The flatness for hundreds of miles around the copperfields is covered by a uniform growth of twisted, squat, flat-topped trees, by anthills and tall coarse grass. The endless continuity of the forest is broken occasionally by a dambo, an open, grassy glade, which often follows the course of a river, flanking its immediate narrow edging of trees, vines, and shrubbery.

The anthills are everywhere—among the trees, in the dambos, among the huts of a native village and the houses of a European settlement—forcing roads to follow tortuous, winding courses, dotting the whole flat face of the earth like the eruption of some weird tropical disease. Trees, in turn, grow out of the



## *The Bush*

older, giant hills, turning them into an integral part of the terrain. A newcomer is surprised to see tall bamboo on a great many of the cones, when there is no bamboo anywhere else. This, of course, is a matter of soil composition; the anthills often produce a growth quite different from that on the adjacent ground.

In a dambo, the hills are usually bare, and greyish white in colour, giving the glade, in certain lights, the look of a bivouacked army encampment. Sometimes a dambo full of smaller mounds is startlingly suggestive of a cemetery, or of a lot of queer altars, raised to outlandish African gods.

The bush is a frighteningly easy place in which to get lost, for everywhere you look the view is the same: a view of trees, anthills, grass—grass, anthills, trees. But for the obstructing anthills, the aisles between the tree trunks would be endless, for, except for the grass, there is surprisingly little undergrowth of any sort. The sameness is intensified by the fact that the flat, spreading branches overhead, with their uniformly small-sized leaves, form a low canopy too thin to give many patches of deep shade. In the middle hours of the day, when the shadows cast by the anthills are foreshortened, there is a monotonous dappling of light everywhere, which is as tiring to the eyes as it is confusing to the vision.

During my first days at the Roan, I remember thinking with some puzzlement that not only did all the bush trees seem to belong to the same species, but that they all appeared to be precisely the same scrub size and the same age. How, then, did the growth reproduce itself, with no saplings, no young trees, coming on? And where were the old ones, the patriarchs? Here was no impression of something in the process of devel-

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oping and maturing and dying, but rather of something ageless and indestructible—a static, if not a petrified, forest.

This fancy was, of course, to a large extent sheer nonsense. The bush grows quickly, as anyone who has tried to keep a space clear of its eternal depredation knows; its trees are, on the average, short-lived. Every wind takes its toll of the sapless, brittle growth. A hatchet with which to dispose of fallen trees is a basic item of equipment for those who motor through the bush.

There is endless devastation by termites, too; once I had the disconcerting experience of leaning against an average-sized tree—about six inches through—and having it collapse beneath my weight, which at the time was a paltry hundred and six pounds. When Douglas had picked me out of the débris, and commented on the general menace to Mother Nature my presence out of doors seemed to offer, we found that the heart of the fallen tree had been completely eaten away, and that what I had leaned against was an empty shell of bark, reinforced inside by a coating of the termites' mud cement.

One of the most destructive agents in the world, strangely enough, does comparatively little damage in the bush. In September, as the dry season draws to a close, natives set fire to the grass in the dambos, the better to see and hunt game. Strangers, from countries where the threat of a forest fire is a deadly menace, are always appalled by this nonchalant burning off of Rhodesian grass, which is possible because the trees have too little resin in them to be readily inflammable. Flame sweeps the ground at their feet clean, leaving them practically untouched.

The close of the dry season is characterized by the thin haze,

## The Bush

partly of dust, partly of smoke from grass fires, that hangs over everything, blurring outlines a little, counteracting a little the hard glare of the sub-tropical sun.

I am still puzzled about the species of Rhodesian bush trees, though I realized soon enough that in spite of a general similarity of appearance there is actually a large variety. There are a great many thorn trees, and a tremendous number bearing queer, exotic seed pods, which range in size from the tiny, scarlet 'lucky bean,' with its bright black eye, to an enormous pod, two to three feet long, and weighing four or five pounds. A man at the Roan had more than sixty in his pod collection when he abandoned it in annoyance because one of these over-size specimens dealt him an unco-operative and knockout blow by dropping on his head.

The wild fig may be identified by the peculiar cluster of fruit on its main trunk, and by the birds that always hover over it when the figs are ripe. There are few trees, however, that are more than slightly reminiscent of species growing in this country, and there are few known locally by other than native names.

There is another sort of tree lore that may be picked up, however, to compensate for a lack of botanical knowledge. One of my most cherished souvenirs of Rhodesia is a piece of cloth made by a native from *musamba* bark. The *mukulu* tree, I learned from an old woman in a bush village, yields a beautiful red dye for the hair. A drum cut from the trunk of the *malumbe* has a deep, booming voice that carries farther than the voices of other drums. A sliver of *mopani* wood, carried about on the person, provides a potent charm against the power of certain evil spirits. The *kasabwa*, one of the first trees to put

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out its new, red foliage in the Rhodesian spring, is useful in the manufacture of another sort of charm—one absolutely guaranteed to bring an enemy's earthly career to an abrupt end. And if you string some *makuso* beans and tie them around your neck, you will never, never suffer from sore throat.

Late in September the bush is the scene of a yearly miracle when thousands of wild flowers, anticipating through some subterranean source the coming of the rains, carpet the earth with queer shades of blue and mauve, red, yellow and orange. The carpeting is quite literal. Most of the wild flowers blossom flat on the ground, as if in their hurry to reach the light they could not waste time on the tedious business of growing stems. I think at the end of twenty years in the country, I should still look with startled eyes at those gaudy little forerunners of the Rhodesian rains. Somehow you never expect them, no matter how often you have seen them before. How could any living thing possibly come out of that dry, sun-baked earth?

And then you walk out one day in September, and there they are, the orchids, and the lilies and all the rest. The wild flowers are Rhodesia's true adventurers, her real pioneers.

Except in general effect, there seemed to me less beauty than oddity in those flowers, with their fleshy petals, their off colour and their queer forms. There were a few beautiful exceptions notably in a big scarlet lily, a small, pinky mauve orchid, and another tall lily of the tiger family. On a single stem of this latter species I have counted as many as a dozen blossoms, each showing an entirely different shade of orange, pink or crimson. A mass of these grew on the slope down to the Patamoto Gorge on the Kafue River; we used to drive out on a certain Sunday every year to gaze, spellbound, at that incredible bank of flame

## *The Bush*

It is in the Rhodesian spring, of course, when the flowers come out, though after you have been in the country a while you stop speaking of spring, summer, or fall, and confine your talk of seasons to the only two that really matter—the rainy and the dry. The rains start with a few scattered storms about the middle of October. Throughout December, January, and February—the Rhodesian summer—there are two or three down-pours a day, which grow somewhat less frequent during March. By the middle of April the rains are over, and a drop of water from heaven during the rest of the year is cause for belief that the end of the world is at hand.

There are a number of factors beside their reversal that create seasonal confusion in the bush. With never a complete falling of leaves, the country never takes on a wintry look. Some of the trees follow the example of the flowers in anticipating the rains a little, when they put out their new foliage. A good many of the new leaves are red or copper-coloured, rather than green, so that the early spring foliage is actually far more suggestive of autumn. That haze in the air, too, always made me think of the haze that marks the fall along our own south Atlantic seaboard.

Once the first rain has washed air and bush clean, the land, almost overnight, takes on the look of midsummer. The foliage overhead is suddenly thicker and green, green grass, hastened by the yearly burning, fills the dambos, green bamboo replaces the dead crop that has latterly turned so many anthills into frowzy scarecrow heads.

The altitude produces a difference between day and night temperatures that is a good deal more noticeable than the over-all seasonal changes. Though the temperature may go as low

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as forty degrees at night in the middle of the dry season, producing an occasional frost, the sun is never anything but exceedingly warm at midday. The summer rains, on the other hand, considerably mitigate the heat, which is most intense during the month just before they begin, though even then the use of a thin blanket at night is comfortable.

That the bush country is keyed to monotone there is no question, and it is probably this fact that makes its every high note of beauty seem so poignant. The frosty, pristine sparkle of the morning air during June and July might be the air or the first dawn of a new world. Outlines through it are so sharp, colours so intense, that you have the surprised feeling sometimes that you have never really seen anything clearly before.

A Rhodesian sunset streaks in a flaming pageant of colour across the sky, touching the whole land with a strange, reflected glory. In the brief pause before night falls, the colours fade almost imperceptibly, leaving the world full of an ineffably soft golden glow, that, in its turn, is all too quickly gone. Homing birds wheel overhead like minute shadows, to merge presently with the large, massed shadow of anthill and spreading treetop. The coolness that falls with the setting sun is part of the whole fabric of evening, a fabric completed by the sound to which night always comes down over the bush—the muted, rhythmic throb of native drums.

Whenever the moon, that looks so much larger from Africa than from anywhere else, is full, the bush takes on a quality of magic unreality. You could almost read by the light of the moon, certainly you can discern objects about you practically as clearly as if it were midday. But these objects are different



## *The Bush*

transformed. For now you are viewing them through a medium of liquid, transparent silver.

There is an incessant buzz of insects throughout the bush in the rainy season, dominated by the shrilling of the cicada, known in Rhodesia as the Christmas beetle, because its interminable song begins a little while before the holiday season. But walking under the trees at midday during the rest of the year, your footsteps break a stillness that is like a presence, living, insistent, almost menacing. Somehow it does not seem a universal stillness, but rather something that immediately precedes, and accompanies, your passing. Your own presence becomes an intrusion, a forcing of quiet and caution on creatures that belong where you do not belong—on the country's four-footed inhabitants.

Though they tended to move back before the spread of human activity in the copperfields, a great many of these creatures lived in the immediate vicinity when work on the Roan first began. Antelope were present in tremendous numbers and enchanting variety—roan, sable, hartebeest, water buck, bush buck, tsessebe, puku, duiker, klipspringer and others. Hippo lived along the banks of the Kafue River, eighteen miles from the mine; lion, leopard, and a few buffalo ranged the countryside, along with warthog, bush pig, antbear, hyena, jackal, fox, and a wide variety of wildcat. Among innumerable smaller creatures were porcupine, hare, mongoose, galago, and lemur. The baboon, in size at least, headed an extensive monkey tribe.

Driving back from Ndola one night the Irwins saw an unusual sight, when a pack of wild dogs ran across the road. Settlers all over southern Africa have long tried to exterminate this vicious canine breed, which in any case can never remain



## *The Bush*

long in one locality, because the other game, on which it preys indiscriminately, all flies before it. An average wild dog weighs seventy pounds, and stands a little over two feet high at the shoulder, and there is said to be no animal in Africa too large for a pack of them to pull down. It is not an attractive creature; an irregular darkness of coat is blotched with black, white, and yellow, adding to the already unpleasant look of a savage, wolf-like canine the even more unpleasant suggestion of kinship with the hyena.

With so many animals around us, the newcomer to the copperfields not unnaturally expected to see some of them every time he went out. He was frequently disappointed, sometimes for months at a stretch. One of my feminine friends, leaving the Roan after more than a year's stay, remarked bitterly that she was glad to be returning to England, where she at least caught an occasional glimpse of a fox or a hare.

But how completely that speckled, tricky light in the bush can hide an animal that is standing motionless only a few paces off, I learned through going about with Douglas, whose eyes had been trained in South Africa. For a long while he had to show me precisely where to look, almost every time an animal appeared in daylight, under the trees. The best chances are afforded, of course, when they come out into the dambos, to graze or to seek water in the very early morning or the late afternoon, or when the headlights of a car catch them suddenly on a road at night. But occasionally their appearance can be casual enough to catch a very new newcomer, used to a land where such appearances do not occur, completely and ridiculously off guard.

I had only been at the Roan a day or two when I was taken

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on my first drive to the Kafue River. Just as we started to cross a big dambo about ten miles out, the rather aged and infirm vehicle in which we were ensconced suddenly gave up the effort involved in moving forward, and coughed to an exhausted stop. While my two escorts examined its interior symptoms, I sat and looked across the dambo at a pretty, pastoral scene that had at once caught my eye. I admired it for several minutes before I was struck by a discrepancy, upon which I commented aloud.

‘Funny,’ I remarked, ‘that those cows should be out here, so far away from a town or anything.’

Two strangled cries answered me, as two young men leaped simultaneously for the rifle in the back seat of the car. I had for the past few minutes been watching a herd of perhaps two dozen hartebeest as they nibbled the dambo grass, about a hundred and fifty yards away. The hartebeest is notoriously stupid, being reputed to harbour maggots in its living brain; but I was pleased to see that these at least had sense enough to make off rapidly, when the first agitated shot, understandably enough, went wide.

My naïve idea that any grazing herd must be composed of cows was, of course, simply the result of an old habit of thought—I had not yet taken in the complete absence of cattle in the whole copperfields country, owing to the presence in the bush of a fly whose bite these animals could not survive. It would have been equally hard then to realize that I was, for the same reason, to live at the Roan for six years without ever seeing a horse, except when I made a trip to the south. The occasional ox used for hauling was always ‘salted,’ which meant that it

## *The Bush*

had been bitten by the fly, had proven hardy enough to recover, and had so acquired immunity.

Monkeys as a rule make themselves very conspicuous in the bush, though even they can be extraordinarily elusive on occasion. Dave Junior and I once came on a troop of small brown ones, disporting themselves charmingly in the treetops close by the roadside. Even when we halted the car they showed no alarm, but rather seemed to appreciate an audience before which to show off. But when their apparent tameness encouraged me to leave the car and try to get some photographs, I suddenly found myself gaping blankly up at treetops that were empty of anything but leaves. Neither of us saw those monkeys go; they didn't, as far as we could make out, go anywhere. It was simply that one moment they were visible, and the next they were not. Peer about as we might, we couldn't find a monkey.

We waited a little while, after my somewhat crestfallen re-entry into the car. In a few minutes, and all at once, the trees were alive with furry acrobats again. As before, they didn't perceptibly come back from anywhere—they were simply there, and that was all.

Driving at night along a narrow bush road is an eerie and fascinating experience. The universe is reduced to the size of that wavering beam of light ahead, with the anthills along the roadside looming in queer, contorted shapes, like the fantastic scenery encountered in a dream. Suddenly a night-jar swoops into the lighted area, hovers uncertainly for a moment, and is gone. During the mating season these dark, swallow-like birds have several long feathers growing at right angles from the tip of each wing. The mood of the night-jars might, at this time of year, safely be presumed to be gay, though the effect they

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produce is quite the reverse. They might be an emanation of night itself—or small lost souls, wandering and bewildered, trailing their long plumes like mourning draperies behind them.

The dark beyond the anthills is curiously flat, until it is suddenly deepened by the shine of a pair of nocturnal eyes, luminous twin orbs of red or yellow or green picked up by the headlights. The more distant ones disappear at once if you stop to investigate; though an animal surprised on the road itself, and blinded by the headlights, will often stand until you must slow down to avoid hitting it.

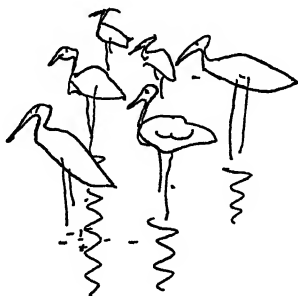
On one unforgettable evening Douglas and I came round a big anthill to find a leopard lying on the Ndola roadside. The lights of the car were full in its face, and it remained perfectly motionless for a few moments, before it rose slowly and moved a little to one side. Douglas had quickly detached the car searchlight from its socket, and now turned its brilliant glare on the animal. The latter betrayed no sign of either fear or animosity, seeming only to be filled with curiosity to know what lay behind that persistent glare. Presently it began to prowl up and down, alongside the car, and within a few paces of it, continuing this manoeuvre for a good five minutes before it moved back, gradually, to disappear among the trees.

That long orange and black body, with its flowing grace of movement silhouetted against the night, was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen; when we were questioned amazedly afterwards as to why we had missed such a golden opportunity to make an easy kill, we were both obliged to admit that though there was a rifle in the back of the car, the idea of using it had never once occurred to us.

The reptile world of the bush is only too populous. Beside

## *The Bush*

the crocodiles in every large river, there is a tremendous assortment of turtles, lizards, and snakes, the latter headed formidably by the green mamba, the cobra, the puff adder, and the boomslang, or tree snake. In point of beauty, the agamo lizard is the most striking reptile; the creature often grows to be a foot long, and its back shades from grey to a brilliant cobalt blue. The latter colour fades almost instantly after death. I once saw one



that had been killed not two minutes before by a native boy—on the erroneous native theory that the creature was poisonous—and there was no trace of its lovely, vivid blue left.

Without its birds the bush country would be quite unimaginable, those most conspicuous by reason of size being the great kori bustard, the eagle, the turkey buzzard and the marabou stork. Treetops are jewelled with the brilliant plumage of small birds; there are a great many strange horned bills to be seen, a great many jauntily crested heads. White 'tick birds' perch industriously on the back of every antelope, a herd of which is often chaperoned, in addition, by the grey, crested touracou, the 'go-away bird,' whose eloquent, raucous cry of 'kway! kway!' is the bane of African hunters. African animals, hearing it, seldom fail to follow the advice.

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The sweetest bird sounds ring out in the early morning, for the popular theory that no tropical birds can sing is by no means universally true. The cries that have probably given rise to it, in Rhodesia at least, cries plaintive, harsh, despairing, tormented, insane, are heard most often in the evening, emanating from the throats of the myriad water birds, strange, beautiful, and grotesque, that haunt every Rhodesian river.

Those who travel the bush on foot do well to keep an eye out for a feathered inhabitant of small size and sober hue. This is the honey bird, whose legend I was inclined to take with a grain of salt when I first arrived at the Roan. But one day as Douglas and I rested under a bush tree, our attention was caught by a small, greyish brown bird which fluttered into the branches just above our heads and set up an agitated twittering, as if it were trying very hard to tell us something.

'It's a honey bird,' said Douglas. 'Come along and let's get some honey.'

In the spirit of one who humours a whim, I came along. The bird at once began to lead us forward, by making short flights and circling back again. Perhaps a quarter of a mile from our starting point it darted into a tree, swung furiously on a small twig, and almost burst its throat in frantic chatter. Through its shrill voice could be heard distinctly the loud hum of bees, emanating from a hollow in the tree in which it perched.

The honey bird's objective is said to be not the honey, but the small bees in the comb, which it can reach when the swarm is smoked out. No native of Rhodesia ever fails to leave a generous piece of comb, for he knows that if he is greedy enough



## *The Bush*

to deprive his guide of its reward, the cheated creature may well retaliate next time by leading him to a lion.

Driving a car very slowly, either day or night, is part of life in the bush, where a motoring speed of twenty-five miles an hour is only occasionally attainable, and where, during the rains, many a road can scarcely be negotiated at all.

During our first rainy season, a party from the Roan braved the motor trip to Ndola, where an itinerant dentist had come on one of his rare visits. That they took two full days and one night to cover the twenty-two miles to Ndola is explained by the fact that they had to push the car by hand most of the way, as it bogged down in one morass after another. Rhodesian itinerant dentistry was not of the highest order in those days, and it is extremely doubtful if the benefit accruing to its collective teeth compensated for the collective attack of malaria to which the whole party promptly succumbed.

Most bush roads are designed for the passage of only one car at a time, and during the dry months the single set of deep ruts cut in the past rainy season's mud is set in a hard, permanent mould. So that when two cars meet, one often has to back some distance before it can get out of the ruts, and allow the other to pass. Bush motorists soon develop a philosophic attitude toward speed, as well as a universally helpful attitude toward each other. Passing a stationary vehicle without asking if help is needed is a thing that simply isn't done in a country where towns are few and far between, and where, even on the most heavily travelled roads, another car may not pass for hours or even days.

Our car once broke down when Douglas and I were twenty miles from Lusaka, to which the government of Northern Rho-

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desia had just been transferred from Livingstone. The breakdown occurred at eleven in the morning, and the first vehicle hove in sight at five the following afternoon.

Crossing a river on a pontoon is part of bush life too, for practically the only bridges on motor roads are small and rather informal log affairs laid across narrow streams. A river pontoon is made of planks floated on large steel oil drums, and is pulled across hand over hand by native boys, along a rope stretched from bank to bank. A river always forms a dreamy interlude in a journey—the pontoon gang never hurries, but pulls to the slow time of their own chant, which monotonously repeats the same two or three words over and over again.

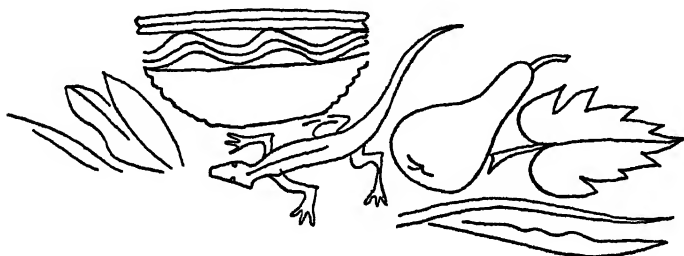
A few natives, walking in single file, and each wearing a strip of calico or one or two sketchy European garments, pass at intervals along a bush road. But even the most rudimentary road must be left for a footpath to reach one of the small groups of huts in which they live—the native villages that complete the whole picture of the copperfields bush.

The average hut in this vicinity is 'daub and wattle'—a circle of upright poles, the chinks between them plastered with mud, and the whole topped by a peaked roof of grass thatch. The ground between the huts is cleared, but a number of stumps are always left in the little patches of mealie or Kaffir corn, which is more apt to be sown than planted in rows. Blue smoke curls up lazily from numerous small wood fires, adult figures squat by the fires, or in the doorways of huts, or move about in the leisurely performance of various duties. A baby is tied by a strip of calico to almost every female back; there are naked, dusty piccannins everywhere, and always a few skinny chickens and skinny, flea-bitten dogs.

## *The Bush*

Six years in it convinced me that my Bulawayo friend was quite right in speaking of the bush country's strange power to attract or repel. Of the hundreds of people who came to work in the copperfields, I remember scarcely anyone who did not feel strongly one way or the other, or who later revised his or her original opinion.

I don't think this can be wholly explained by physical conditions, though those who dislike the environment complain



vociferously of the monotony, the flatness, the lack of outlook, the long wetness and then the long drought, the discomforts of travel, the crocodiles in the rivers that look so cool and inviting, the other reptiles on the ground, and the insects everywhere. Even those who like it do not attempt to refute these things, because they are all true. It is hard to find as many cogent arguments on the other side.

Not all the argument in the world would settle the question in any case. Behind the physical characteristics of the land there is a large impassivity, an indifference, a complete lack of softness or allure. And there is at the same time an odd and contradictory insistence. These are qualities that affect the spiritual rather than the physical being; each human spirit feels their impact and responds to them in its own way.

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As far as my personal reaction is concerned, I had not been at the Roan very long before I went up to one of the trading stores and bought a pair of *veldtschoen*. Of course, I made the acquaintance of the bush in Douglas's company, and it is just possible that this had some bearing on the situation.



## *Kimberley Brick Camp*

OUR FIRST YEAR at the Roan had a special flavour, for during this year we lived in a temporary camp while the company, among its other multitudinous activities, worked on the construction of a complete residential township for its European employees. These were to number about two thousand at the peak of the four-year construction and development period, and were eventually to be reduced to an operating crew of some seven hundred and fifty.

The temporary camp had been put up, prior to our arrival, by the small crew of about a hundred who had carried out preliminary exploration of the orebody. It was a very temporary affair indeed, and life in it contrasted strongly in a great many ways with our subsequent life in the permanent township.

The initial point of attack on the Roan orebody lay in an angle formed by a bend in the Luanshya River, which had guided William Collier to his discovery of the outcropping rock. The river flowed through a slight depression here, and the main shaft and permanent surface plant of the mine were to occupy the open slope of the dambo below the river bend; at the time

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of our arrival the small temporary mine buildings were scattered about this area.

The new township was set a mile back in the bush, well away from the noise and bustle of the plant, and where there was no danger of a future caving in of mined-out ground. Its buildings were ranged in neat rows along straight avenues, a feat which could never have been accomplished without cutting down thousands of trees and blasting away hundreds of anthills. The township avenues were named, exotically, after more or less local flora—Acacia, Bougainvillea, Casuarina, Datura, Eucalyptus and Funyama—though an observant eye will detect a somewhat more practical and prosaic motif lurking in the initial letters of the plants chosen. The cross streets frankly started at First, and went up.

Beside its dwelling houses, the township comprised a beautifully equipped, hundred-bed hospital, a handsome recreation club with a number of sports fields attached, two mess buildings and two dormitories for the use of single men, and a guest house for the accommodation of official visitors to the mine. The four-, five-, and six-room bungalows designed for occupation by the general run of mine employees varied only slightly in floor plan, but were painted and trimmed in different colours to avoid too great a uniformity of appearance. A few larger ones, the permanent residences of major officials, gave at least two of the avenues the air of an exclusive suburb.

The building materials used throughout the township were calculated to withstand the attack of termites and the excessive seasonal shifts from wet to dry. Foundations and floors were cement, walls were burnt brick, and roofs were corrugated iron

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or tile. Wood was used in interiors only where it could not well be avoided.

While the mine township was being built, the Northern Rhodesian government was at work on an adjacent township of its own. The primary purpose of this was to provide the mining community with local government service—district administration, civil police, postal and telegraph office, grade school—and to house the attached government employees. It also afforded a place where anyone who wished to serve the mining community in a commercial or professional capacity could establish his business and make his home. Beside a number of shops, and so on, the government township eventually accommodated the railway station, branches of two South African banks, several churches, and a hotel.

The joint community, formed by mine and government townships, was christened Luanshya, after the local river.

Convenience had been the sole factor considered in placing the houses in the temporary camp; only the sketchiest clearing had been done around them. They nestled haphazardly under the bush trees just along the edge of the Luanshya dambo and immediately adjacent to the mine workings and plant. So adjacent were they, in fact, that an occasional yard was decorated by a drill, or the headframe of a shaft.

The temporary camp was nameless. Our mail and telegrams came in marked 'via Ndola,' and were handled by a government clerk ensconced in the rather cramped quarters of a room in one of the mine buildings. We were governed by the Ndola District Officer, who motored to the mine two or three times a week. A bank clerk came from Ndola every payday to facilitate the prompt deposit of checks. The wife of one of the

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engineers conducted a small private school in her own home, while our spiritual welfare was looked after by a Church of England padre who visited the copperfields two or three times a year, holding services at the Roan in the temporary staff mess.

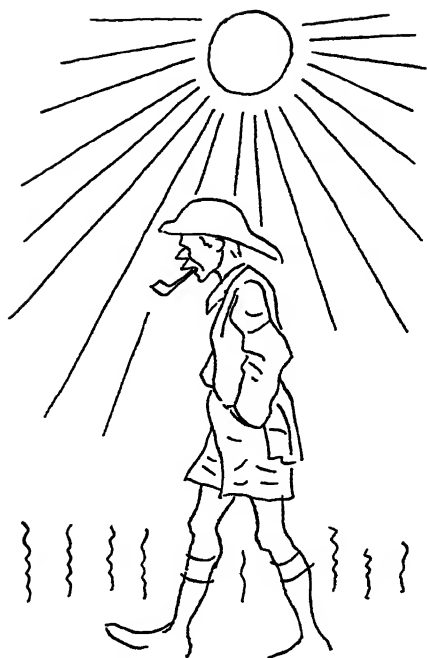
Our house in the temporary camp stood in the centre of a row of six or seven married quarter houses, which looked out over the Luanshya dambo, above the river bend, a location which gave us two of the rarest things to be found in the bush: a view, and a sense of openness and space. The road between us and the dambo was known, facetiously, as Society Row, because all the houses facing on it were occupied by major officials of the mine.

Through the trees beyond our back yard we could just glimpse one end of the staff mess, with the two community tennis courts in front of it. At the other end of the mess clustered the twenty or so rondavels occupied by single members of the staff—'the staff' being composed of employees who were paid on a monthly basis.

A little farther along the road on which the staff mess fronted, and which ran, roughly, at right angles to Society Row, stood the 'men's mess,' surrounded by about seventy-five more rondavels. These took care of the single men who worked on shift. A tiny guest house and a very impromptu hospital completed the central group of temporary buildings. The rest of the married quarters, of which there were about two dozen in all, were to be found here and there in the bush beyond.

Not that they were always to be found very easily, however. Going out to tea one afternoon during our first week at the Roan, Dorothy and I spent a good hour stalking our hostess's residence. The chief trouble was that we kept coming back to





the staff mess, each time along a different one of the small roads or footpaths that did duty as streets. Few of these roads led to anything but various working places around the mine, but they criss-crossed, doubled back and forth, and scurried about camp itself in an extremely busy and highly disconcerting way.

On the side directly opposite Society Row, camp proper petered out in a straggle of married quarters along the start of the Ndola road. About a mile beyond was a government location on which stood the little group of trading stores that served the mining community, and the houses in which the traders lived. These wooden and tin structures were even more temporary than those on the mine; throughout the year they stood there they never looked anything but on the immediate verge of collapse.

The edge of camp on the remaining side away from the dambo was roughly marked by the presence of two adjoining

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football fields, one for Rugby, the other for soccer. Where the ground rose again on the far side of the Luanshya, directly opposite the plant, was the native compound, reached by a half mile or so of narrow dirt road. The compound was never moved from this location, but was gradually enlarged to accommodate a native labour force of six thousand boys, who, with their families, formed a black community of eleven thousand. Even after its own hospital, recreation club, playgrounds, and sports fields had been put in, and in spite of the more substantial building materials used, the completed compound, with its round, peaked-roof huts, still looked like an enormous native village.

Until becoming thoroughly oriented, it was hard for a newcomer to identify a particular house in the old camp, because it was so exactly like almost all the other houses. All the temporary buildings, whether they were used for business or residential purposes, were made of Kimberley, or sun-dried, brick, and were roofed with either corrugated iron or grass thatch. All of them, except the rondavels, were low, oblong structures, set flat on the ground, and in most cases flanked back and front by full-length, heavily screened verandahs.

The general office stood out in the plant group because it was the largest and because it had been whitewashed. Among the married quarters our house enjoyed the rather sinister distinction of suggesting a mausoleum, since its walls had, for some obscure reason, been painted black. The Kimberley brick walls of all the others had been left in natural mud-brown. A thatched roof had a softening effect, giving the house it covered a certain air of quaintness; the rest of the buildings looked, according to their size, like warehouses or small brown shoeboxes.

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For practical reasons, corrugated iron was used more often than tile on the houses in the permanent township. Perhaps the less said about the appearance of this type of roofing the better, though like everything else in the bush, it is subject to a periodic metamorphosis, in this case an extremely incongruous one. The change occurs at full moon, when an iron-roofed house suddenly and strangely looks as if it were capped with snow. Coming sleepily into the township by car late at night, I have more than once sat up with a jerk, glimpsing a row of dazzling white roofs, thinking myself unaccountably back in a northern land again.

The rondavels gave the old camp its most picturesque touch. Patterned on the native hut, and named by the Afrikanders, the single-room, peaked-roof 'round house' is used all over southern Africa. Kimberley brick is vastly more becoming to a circular than a square structure; the brown brick rondavels at the Roan were thatched with grass that had weathered to a soft grey. The little buildings somehow managed to convey the impression that they had not been built at all, but had simply sprouted, like so many mushrooms, among the low, squatty trees and the tall conical anthills of the country.

We were later to be startled in the township by a far less happy version of the rondavel—one known specifically as a Kator hut, and distinguished by the fact that both walls and roof were made of corrugated iron. The Kator hut is an invaluable item on a large construction job, where a great many extra men have to be temporarily housed, for it is cheap, portable, durable, and adequately comfortable. It is unfortunate, in view of all of these virtues, that it should look so very much like a large, covered ashcan. Dozens of large covered ashcans,

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set about in rows, as they were at the Roan all through the construction period, can only be described as appalling. Even the Rhodesian moon couldn't do very much to improve their appearance.

The yards in the old camp were almost as much alike as the houses. Each front yard was enclosed by a bamboo fence, or by rows of whitewashed stones. Neither one of these, of course, was protective in character, but simply served to indicate the area that must be kept clear of bush growth, and swept of general débris, by the garden boy. Later, in the township, the water supply pumped in from the larger Kafubu River was sufficient to allow for the regular watering of lawns and gardens. But in the temporary camp a lawn was quite out of the question. When the Luanshya was at its lowest there wasn't even enough water to use on flowers; when there was, it had to be drawn from the back yard tap and applied laboriously through the spout of a tin watering can.

There were, however, always a few flower beds, occupied by plants that could get along on a minimum of water, rich soil, and other horticultural luxuries: cannas, zinnias, petunias, gal-lardias, marigolds, phlox, geraniums, daisies, cosmos. There were, in addition, always a number of ten-gallon petrol drums, painted green, set here and there about every yard. A shrub—poinsettia, bougainvillea, frangipani, hibiscus—or perhaps a rose bush, had been planted in each of these in an attempt to baffle the termites. Each drum had to be moved every day—if left in one spot too long, a termite colony was sure to effect an entrance through the bottom.

Behind each temporary house stood the kitchen rondavel, the laundry shed, and the small sanitary outhouse. The third

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member of this domestic triumvirate, known to the boys as the *piccannin kia*, the little house, was modestly concealed behind a trellis, which was usually covered with a beautiful blue morning-glory vine. The object of the screening, however, was subject to constant defeat by the house boy, as he made his frank and cheerful announcement to callers:

‘Mama in *piccannin kia*. Will come one, two minute, maybe three.’

A simple pipe and spigot, rising from the ground near the kitchen, represented the household water supply. A small outdoor fireplace, or sometimes merely an informal arrangement of stones, and a petrol drum, provided for the heating of bath water in the dry season; during the rains this operation was transferred to the small, smoking and already cluttered kitchen stove. The number of occupants of a house could be gauged at once from the rear, by counting the round, shallow tin bath tubs that hung against the wall on a row of nails. On the wall of each rondavel hung, like a badge of bachelorhood, its occupant’s lone tin tub.

I have, incidentally, often wondered whether the petrol drum, with the countless domestic uses to which it is put, or the inevitable tin bath tub, would more completely symbolize European life in the primitive Rhodesian bush. I think, on the whole, the tub. Certainly the modern equipment in the township houses reached its apex in the bathrooms’ glistening appointments, which permitted us to extend one of the lordliest gestures of hospitality that a visitor to Rhodesia can receive. When a geological congress once arrived to inspect the Roan, it was not of the luncheon, the sight-seeing tour of the property, the tea or the sundowner that the geological wives spoke

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most lyrically in writing to thank us afterward—it was of the bath we had arranged for each visiting lady to have, in a stationary, porcelain tub, with plenty of running water.

The tub would win my personal vote as a symbol because of a brief but lively encounter I had with one of them not long after I arrived at the Roan.

When the bath hour came, the boys always took the tubs to the various bedrooms, placed them on the floor with towels and soap beside them, and then filled them with hot water brought in in buckets.

On the occasion of which I speak I was dressing to attend a dance, and, as Douglas was to be my escort, I put on my very best frock. In those days our sole touch of modern luxury was electric light, supplied by the mine power plant. But the plant, like everything else in camp, was small and temporary, and a thunderstorm was more than apt to put it completely out of commission. Sometimes it went out of commission on its own hook. Against this perpetually imminent contingency a supply of candles was always kept on hand.

The lights, true to form, went out tonight. As I had just completed my toilet I did not bother to strike a match, but started briskly for the livingroom, where I knew the boys would light candles at once. That the centre of the floor was now occupied by a round tin tub was a detail that quite escaped my memory, until my shin came in sudden violent contact with its edge. A convulsive effort to recover my lost balance merely resulted in my spinning about so as to go down in a backward instead of a forward position.

As I sat in the soapy water, breathing heavily, the door opened to admit Cigarette, the first house boy. Showing no

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sign of finding my situation at all unusual, he placed a lighted candle in my unresisting hand, remarked, 'Light out, Mama. S'ank you, Mama,' and bowed himself gravely out.

The use of the portable tubs, however, had one distinct advantage in the old camp, where the bath hour always came between sundowner and dinner time. The tropical custom of seeing the sun down with a drink was a popular one in the copperfields; so popular that guests sometimes showed a tendency to stay and see it up next morning as well. But the tin bath preparation was a noisy and conspicuous ritual—with boys passing to and fro, banging tubs and buckets, and sloshing large quantities of hot water about here and there—and all guests, except those who would under similar circumstances have ignored the final cracking up of the universe, accepted the obvious inference and went home.

Whisky and soda, 'gin and mix'—gin with sweet and dry vermouth, uniced—and a bottled lemon drink called Limas are the chief items served at a Rhodesian sundowner. No matter what its ingredients, however, every beverage consumed at a sundowner in the temporary camp had a distinctive quality, which was derived partly from the fact that the scant ice available never stretched as far as the drinks, and partly from the bitter contents of the quinine bottle that was always passed around.

The inside of a temporary house was, if anything, simpler than the outside. It consisted of two, three, or four rooms, set in a straight row, between the long front and back verandahs. The inside walls in most cases were left, like the outside, in Kimberley brick, *au naturel*. The Irwins' house, and only one or two others, boasted plastered walls and a cement floor; the

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prevalent type of flooring was the inevitable Kimberley brick.

A Kimberley brick is rather larger in size than an ordinary brick, and its sun-dried manufacture makes its composition considerably softer. The brick in the floors of the temporary houses had been laid originally with rather more haste than care, and had done some subsequent buckling, sinking, and chipping. Such a floor offered an unsteady base for furniture, a treacherous footing for the unwary walker. The grass mats we all used as rugs wavered uncertainly across its uneven surface.

To insect activity in the copperfields I am devoting a later chapter, with special reference to termites. Suffice it to say here that every temporary house harboured at least one termite colony, which ate the walls or floor industriously from the inside. At any moment a foot might go through a gutted piece of floor; at any moment pressure on a gutted section of wall might cause it to fall down.

Whenever an incident of this sort occurred a company carpenter came up and filled the cavity with some new mud brick, upon which the termites at once fell happily to. On looking back, I find myself chiefly struck by the calmness with which we came in time to make such reports to the carpenter shop. I am quite sure that the piecemeal collapse of a house in most localities would cause the voices of its occupants to be heard far and wide. The human organism, it seems, is capable of adjusting itself to almost any situation.

It was a moot point in the temporary camp as to whether corrugated iron or grass thatch made a preferable roof under which to live. Iron was water-proof, and, in the permanent houses, with their proper ceilings and ventilation arrangements, it gave equally good protection from the sun. But if there was



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a ceiling at all in a temporary house, it was only a piece of heavy canvas. Sitting under this sort of overhead covering at midday you were apt to develop a strong feeling of kinship with a fried egg.

The torrential Rhodesian rains fell on iron with the roar of a thousand Niagaras; when thunder accompanied the down-pour, the pandemonium inside a tiny room transcended sound and beat on nerve centres with an impact that was almost physical. Speech, of course, was out of the question; thought itself scattered before the onslaught like so many mice scuttling to safety. No thunderstorm, fortunately, lasted long. When it was over, you felt that life would never have any greater gift to offer than this simple absence of din.

A thatched roof assured quiet and coolness, but was apt to develop a good many leaks during the rains. These had an interesting habit of never appearing twice in the same place, so that a sort of checker game, with bowls, buckets, petrol tins, and kitchen utensils as men, kept the household busily occupied during the beginning of each storm. When even a canvas ceiling was lacking, the occupants of a thatched-roof house were exposed to the occasional descent from the thatch of an insect, a lizard, or even a snake.

In the permanent houses the company installed sets of furniture, which were made to order by a sawmill in the south and which, though plain, were neat and substantial. The furniture installed in the temporary ones was sketchy and mongrel in character, having been picked up second-hand in Ndola or Bulawayo. We supplemented it by an occasional crude piece purchased from an itinerant native carpenter, and by a great many packing boxes, barrels, and boards. Cushions were in-

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variably covered with calico, a material which also did duty as window curtains and counterpanes. The only closet in a temporary house was a small pantry, located at one end of the back verandah; clothing usually hung on nails driven into the bedroom wall.

A few of the curios made in the native bush villages and brought into camp for sale formed useful and sometimes ornamental additions to our early household equipment. The handwoven grass mats made excellent floor coverings. They were cool in appearance, dust was easily shaken out of them, and, costing only a sixpence each, they could be discarded without extravagance when signs of wear appeared. A geometrical design was usually woven into such a mat with a strand of grass darkened with vegetable dye; but since a native weaver almost always grew bored with routine before he had followed it for five or six feet, the design in the two ends was seldom the same. Such little idiosyncrasies, however, put the unmistakable stamp of handwork on any product, and so add to its charm.

The Barotse, the Northern Rhodesian tribe most skilled in almost all of the native crafts, made beautiful karosses, or fur rugs, by putting antelope, leopard, or wildcat skins together with tiny, neat stitches. The big grass trays made by the Barotse were so substantial in construction that I am still using two purchased during my first year at the Roan. On these we always served our tea and sundowners.

The Balamba specialized in the manufacture of the 'elephant stool.' This was a stool carved in a single piece from a section of tree trunk about a foot in diameter and twenty inches long. Its round, thick top rested on the back of an often quite original, but always charming, elephant. Sometimes a monkey was

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used for the support, and occasionally a grotesque human figure, or that of some other animal; but the piece was always known as an 'elephant stool,' regardless of the detail in its base. In the temporary camp elephant stools served us almost exclusively as incidental tables.

A few of the other native curios possessed beauty or serviceability, a good many were merely curious—but they all had the charm of novelty in our unaccustomed eyes, and our houses were decorated copiously with the products of African arts and crafts. Walls were hung with grotesque and often repulsive wooden masks. Across every shelf marched a line of fancifully conceived small animals, carved in rhinoceros horn, wood, ivory, or bone. Larger wooden animals served as door stops. Assegais, short stabbing spears, bows, arrows, and drums stood in every corner. Even our persons were adorned in African style, with ivory and rhinoceros horn beads and bangles, with elephant hair rings and pins.

In the township we could speak to each other over the local telephone system put in and operated by the company. Telephones in the old camp were confined to a few in the mine offices; and chits, or notes, were used for personal communications of all sorts. One of the most characteristic sights to be seen in those days was the veritable swarm of white-clad piccannins who constantly proceeded from point to point bearing chits.

It was not a rapid means of com-



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munication, for time, a negligible factor in the lives of all Africans, bothered the piccannins least of all. The small black messenger seldom set out with any very distinct notion as to where he was going; his method was to stroll around camp, offering the chit to every white person he could find. There was a name on the envelope and he felt, philosophically, that it must be accepted, sooner or later, by the owner of the name. His confidence was justified on the whole, though the hour was usually late rather than soon.

At ten o'clock every morning, and again at three in the afternoon, the old camp fairly erupted boys, in all shapes and sizes. A boy or a piccannin emerged at these hours from every married quarter house, from every single man's rondavel. Each bore a tea tray, which he carried to an office, a shop, a shaft, a drill—wherever his particular Bwana happened to be at work.

The township was too far removed from the plant to allow for the continuation of this personal tea service, and the brewing and distribution of Britain's national beverage was then taken over by the corps of office messenger boys.

Most of the male Americans, incidentally, began by viewing the mid-morning and mid-afternoon absorption of tea by their British colleagues with a good deal of derision, though there was scarcely one who failed in the end to succumb to the insidious habit. The most notable succumbing, perhaps, was done by Dave, who had once answered Dorothy's argument that there must be a sound reason for so firmly established a custom, with the simple declarative statement that tea would be served in his office only to his dead body.

Our recreational horizon widened considerably with our move to the township. Beside the greatly increased number of out-

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door sports that could be pursued, the recreation club offered us a pleasant gathering place for tea, sundowners, bridge or dancing, and moving pictures were shown there twice a week. Not long after the move, too, it became possible for almost anyone to get out of camp for weekend picnics or hunting trips, or for visits to Ndola or one of the other mines. A large number of company cars had been purchased and assigned to various employees by this time, and private cars had been acquired by others. Lacking a car, anyone could at least reach Ndola by bus, or by the branch line railroad that had then been built.

During the first year there were only two private cars in camp, and about a half dozen owned by the company. For a while employees could borrow the latter, but when one of them was found strewn rather widely about the Ndola road one morning the privilege was summarily withdrawn. With such scant means of transportation available, general recreational activity was pretty well confined for a year to what could be done inside camp itself.

Sport to begin with was confined to masculine football and mixed tennis. Shortly after four-thirty, when the mine offices closed for the day, the tennis contingent, a large one, converged on the two staff mess courts. There were invariably more players than could possibly get in sets during the remainder of the afternoon, but a community teapot offered a certain amount of consolation to the unlucky ones.

As my own first experience of the game in its British phase, I found the early tennis at the Roan extremely interesting from the point of view of vocabulary. A ball, I found, was 'away' when it was out, 'right' when it was in. Instead of suggesting

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a rally before a set, the thing to say was, 'Shall we have a hit?' Poor players were designated as 'rabbits,' and a good shot was greeted by an exclamation of 'Played, sir!' 'Well up!' or 'Pretty to watch!' Or perhaps simply by 'Nicely!' With a forty-love score against me, I learned to turn to my partner and remark, 'This is a good game to win.' Unless he got the suggestion in first, in which case my proper response was either 'Right-oh!' or 'Carry on!'

From another point of view tennis in the old camp derived a special character from the presence of Mrs. Samuels, wife of a geologist who carried out some of the early research work on the Roan orebody.

It is just possible that Mrs. Samuels was born with a tennis racquet in her hand instead of a silver spoon in her mouth. She was built on the brief curving lines of a tennis ball; her movements about the court were strongly reminiscent of the convulsive efforts to free itself made by a captive balloon in a high wind. Her strokes, if limited to two, were painfully effective—she was mistress of an innocuous-looking but wicked underhand cut service, and of a high and infuriatingly accurate lob.

But it was not in play that Mrs. Samuels made her real contribution to tennis in the old camp. Mrs. Samuels was, first of all, an organizer, whose genius for arranging badly matched sets was only equalled by the persistence with which she arranged them, and the cheerfulness with which she ignored her fellow players' reluctance to be so arranged. Her surplus energy, which was considerable, she devoted to dealing single-handed with any supplementary matters that arose in connection with her favourite sport. The Roan Tennis Club was headed by a

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committee, but the attempts of this body to function under Mrs. Samuels' régime were suggestive of the gambol of insects in the path of a steam roller.

Mrs. Samuels reached the mess courts every afternoon via a footpath through the bush. The first glimpse of her approach was tacitly recognized as the legitimate cue for any sets already in progress to start again at love-all, thus providing everyone but Mrs. Samuels herself with a slight breathing spell before the onset of intensive organization.

Mrs. Samuels occupied the period profitably by shifting the position of the spectators' benches so that they would get either more or less sun—necessarily shifting the disgruntled spectators at the same time—serving tea from the community pot to those who did not want it as well as to those who did; shouting across to the mess for a boy to bring more water; lecturing him on his slowness in doing so; instructing the piccannins who retrieved balls in the proper execution of their duties—occasionally springing up to give one of them an active demonstration or a clip on the ear—keeping score for both sets; settling any debatable point that arose in either of them; distributing advice and encouragement impartially amongst eight players; and pairing off the next fours so that they would presently be able to bound on to the courts, to begin their uneven struggle with no loss of time.

'Come along now!' was her cheery rallying cry, as soon as the last ball had been hit or missed. 'Mustn't waste good daylight—it doesn't grow on trees, you know!'

When Mr. Samuels' geological labours were terminated, a vacuum seemed for a while to envelop the staff mess tennis courts. This illusion gradually passed, and the game played on

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them came, in time, to assume a normal aspect. But no one who played it under Mrs. Samuels' vigorous management will probably ever again watch the approach of a stout, sandy-haired, white-clad matron, without experiencing a slight shiver of nervous apprehension. Nor will it be found easy to take up a tennis racquet, without glancing at the nearest tree, and remembering that daylight is not one of its fruits.

Perhaps it was the high pressure on the tennis courts that prompted several followers of the ancient Scottish pastime to lay out the Roan golf course. The laying-out process was an extended one, for with no course expert among us, everyone felt, with some justice, that his or her opinion was as good as that of anyone else. A great deal of time was consumed in rambling en masse about the section of bush that lay between the Luanshya River and the new township site, and arguing where this hole should begin and that one end.

Clearing the tract at last agreed upon was a protracted business too. The company lent us enough boys to actually cut down trees and take stumps out, but we had to use piccannins, recruited from families in the compound, for the rest of the work. These small wights chopped the coarse bush grass down, almost blade by blade, with sticks or small hand scythes. The operation threatened to extend into eternity, and the more enthusiastic golfers began to play a species of game, which consisted largely in losing balls, long before the fairways were cleared. It was a game in which no putting was involved, the position of future tees and greens being merely indicated by stakes driven into the ground. Anthills on all sides served as quite unnecessary hazards.

The piccannins now impressed into service as caddies de-



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rived more real pleasure from our early Roan golf than we did. Carrying a bag of clubs about their own size was evidently regarded as a small price to pay for the privilege of watching a mad white man or woman hit a ball and then walk after it and hunt for it. They found the human aspect of the situation far too absorbing to be of the slightest use themselves as ball retrievers.

In the township recreation club we danced on cement, to strains produced by a large professional orchestra organized among mine employees. Cement is not, of course, an ideal surface for dancing—it can duplicate in foot and leg muscles all the sensations of a bad case of toothache—but a wooden floor was not considered practical on account of the termites. Aside from this detail, however, the recreation club dances were much like dances held anywhere else in the world.

Our dances in the old camp possessed several features that rendered them quite unique.

By the time we were well established in the township, the company's work in clearing the surrounding bush of malarial mosquitoes was sufficiently well advanced to permit the dropping of such precautionary measures; but health rules in the old camp required us to sleep under nets, to take our daily doses of quinine, and to attend all evening functions, including dances, in mosquito boots.

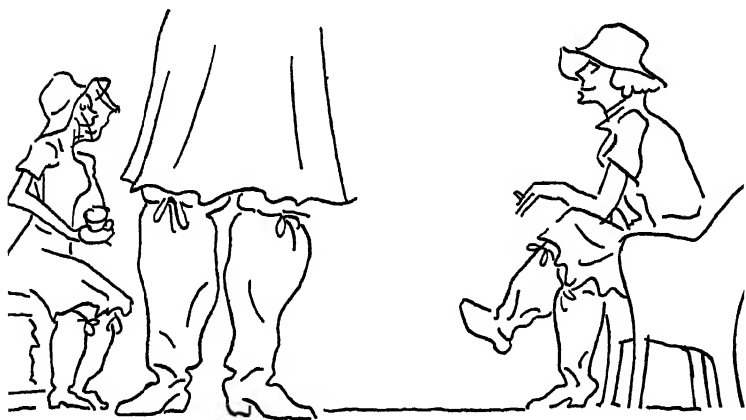
The mosquito boots sold at the local trading stores were made of reddish brown calfskin, and were low in the heel and broad in the toe. The part encasing the leg followed the general design of a riding boot top, except that it was soft and floppy, was far roomier than a riding boot top, and was tied just below the knee with a drawstring. This unlovely feature

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was mercifully concealed by male trousers; but skirts were short that year, and the worst, in our feminine case, was fully revealed. An evening gathering of any sort presented rather more the appearance of a female elephantiasis clinic than a party.

We danced, in the old camp, on the Kimberley brick floor of the temporary staff mess. The mess floor, if anything, was the most uneven in camp, possessing the sole virtue of being the largest. For the usual gliding motion of the foxtrot or waltz it was, therefore, necessary for dancers to substitute a series of antelope-like leaps, a feat not gracefully achieved in mosquito boots. The softness of the brick caused the room, shortly after each dance began, to fill with a dense cloud of brickdust. Coughs and sneezes resounded through the hall almost as loudly and rhythmically as did the music.

The latter was furnished in those days by a three-piece orchestra, consisting of piano, drum, and banjo. The standing of its members was purely amateur, but they were a public-spirited trio, and they happened, too, to be a good one. Their flawless rhythm, though it was rather wasted on our bounding



### *Kimberley Brick Camp*

technique, furnished one of the two really bright aspects of our early dances. The other lay in the length of the stag line, which could have been wrapped around the mess building two or three times. The most settled matron, mosquito boots and all, enjoyed a popularity at those functions that could only be equalled in a more balanced community by the most glamorous of a season's crop of glamour girls.

Miss Darby of Johannesburg made one of the mess dances stand out from all the others in the memory of those who attended it. Miss Darby had dawned on the Roan like a large, golden sun, when she came up to keep house for her father, who was a crack shaft sinker on the underground development force. She had not been in residence very long, however, before it became apparent that she, too, had mastered a profession, and that this took decided precedence, in her scheme of things, over the matter of placing suitable food on the parental table. Miss Darby's profession has often been described as woman's oldest.

The Empire State Building would have been about as inconspicuous in the early Roan community as Miss Darby and her activities; and harried mine officials presently came to the conclusion that she had best be removed. This duty was delegated to the Mine Secretary, a small, quiet man, whose bachelorhood had obviously been prolonged by his extreme nervousness in the presence of the mildest members of the opposite sex.

It was on a Saturday afternoon that he presented the flamboyant Miss Darby, on behalf of the company, with her rail fare to Johannesburg; and put her in the company car which would take her to Ndola in time to catch the evening train south. The young assistant who lent him moral support on this

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occasion reported that he got the business over with all possible dispatch, being thrown into acute panic by Miss Darby's amiable tendency to pat him on his slightly bald head, and address him as 'dear.'

The dancers in the mess were applauding for an encore at about ten that night, when the screen doors at one end of the hall burst suddenly open, to admit a vision of greater magnificence than dwellers in a bush mining camp were often privileged to see. The vision was composed of pink taffeta gown, green satin wrap, rhinestone-studded handbag and slippers, and enormous green ostrich feather fan. Every item was patently new, and all were topped by the freshly peroxidized and elaborately marcelled head of the lately deported Miss Darby.

Sweeping the room with a china blue gaze, Miss Darby's eyes came to rest on the Mine Secretary. The latter's shyness had kept him from attending many dances in the past, but it was unquestionably his memory of the next few moments that brought his terpsichorean career to its permanent end. His condition was plainly paralytic as he, in common with an enthralled assemblage, watched Miss Darby cross the floor to execute a graceful pirouette in front of him.

'How d'ye like the rig, dear?' cried Miss Darby in her full clear soprano. 'Not bad for a hole like Ndola, is it? I'm so glad you're here tonight, dear—minute I saw this pink taffeta I knew it was a better buy than a ticket to Jo'burg, and I knew you'd think the same once you saw me in it.'

'Thanks, ducky,' concluded Miss Darby, bending forward to plant an affectionate kiss on the Mine Secretary's congested brow. 'Thanks ever so!'

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An itinerant operator sometimes brought a roll of movie film to the old camp. It was always a silent one, fortunately, for the acoustics in the men's mess, where it was shown, would never have allowed a talkie to be heard. The thatched roof of this structure leaked freely during the rains, forcing most of the audience to take shelter under umbrellas.

Peering at the screen from beneath the edge of one umbrella, and around and above the domes of a lot of others, it was impossible to perceive any continuity of thought in what went forward on the screen. Actions took place that were based on no apparent cause, committed to achieve no understandable purpose. Shadowy faces smiled or grimaced or shed glycerine tears for no discoverable reason, beyond the demonstration of what could be accomplished with a single set of human features. But if we lost on the narrative side of the movies we attended on wet nights in the men's mess, I have always felt that we gained something else. In those fragmentary glimpses of the screen I think we unquestionably caught the pure, undiluted essence of the great celluloid art.

Though not precisely recreational in character, there was a final occupation to which we all turned a hand in the old camp. Tonsorial parlours were eventually established in the government township, but until then we were all, of necessity, amateur barbers. Members of each household took turns at cutting and being cut at home; from the tennis courts an excellent view was afforded of single men shearing each other on the staff mess verandah. A number of us became reasonably expert at achieving an ultimate effect, but as we did it in rather the same way that the piccannins cut the grass on the golf

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course, a mutual haircut usually took up most of the daylight hours on a Saturday afternoon.

Douglas and I played tennis as partners in the old camp, did simultaneous battle with the embryo golf course, bounded in unison over the mess floor brick, crouched under one umbrella at the movies, and cut each other's hair. Deciding to put our future co-operation on a permanent basis, we were married on the anniversary of my arrival at the Roan—a date set automatically by the presence in the copperfields of the visiting Church of England padre.

The ceremony took place in the Irwins' temporary house, which the padre consecrated for the purpose. Beside the consecration, a special licence, signed by the governor of Northern Rhodesia, was necessary, for we had learned of the padre's impending visit too late to follow the regular licence procedure. For even the special one we had to telegraph to Livingstone and have a friend get the governor's signature on it at once, and then hurl it, panting, on the northbound train.

The train did not reach Ndola until the Saturday night before our Sunday noon wedding. At Ndola the licence was almost literally snatched from the hands of a startled postmaster by another stout-hearted and helpful friend, who then broke all bush records, as well as a spring on his car, in rushing the vital document dramatically to the Roan. His gesture was not entirely histrionic, however; if it had been left to come out on the lorry with the rest of the mine mail on Sunday, it would not have arrived within the time when a Sunday wedding is considered legal by the Church of England.

It was the padre himself, in the end, who almost failed to arrive in time. He had a Sunday morning service scheduled at

### *Kimberley Brick Camp*

Bwana M'kubwa, thirty odd miles from the Roan, and the car sent to fetch him set him down at the Irwins' house only half an hour before the legal time had expired.

The company awaiting him was a small one, for the shortness of time had precluded the issue of general invitations, and made it impossible for Douglas's family to come up from Johannesburg. Every essential rôle in a wedding party, however, was filled. Douglas's brother Gordon, who worked at Mufulira, was there to be best man, Dorothy to be matron of honour and Dave to give me away. There was even one guest—the heroic gentleman who had brought the licence from Ndola. Dave Junior had unfortunately gone off to school in Johannesburg. He feels this was just as well, as he would undoubtedly have been impressed into service as a flower boy.

Dorothy has often remarked since that it takes a wedding in the Rhodesian bush to bring out a woman's latent talents; what ours brought out in her was nothing short of genius. Having produced a cake as delicious to eat as it was handsome to look at, she made up a perfect bridal bouquet, with white flowers collected here and there from various camp gardens.

She thinks some sixth, prophetic sense must have prompted her, a year before, to pack a length of white satin in one of her trunks. She had asked herself at the time what use she would probably have for white satin in the Rhodesian wilds, and, without finding any very good answer, had put it in anyway. Armed with a pair of shears, a paper of pins, a needle and some basting thread, she now turned this into a charming wedding gown, and a white Spanish scarf into the cap type of veil.

Against a high Chinese screen placed at one end of the cool,

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darkened livingroom, she arranged a lace-covered table holding a pair of tall white candles in silver candlesticks and a low silver bowl of white flowers, making as lovely a marriage altar as anyone could have asked for.

The combined poise of Dorothy and the padre achieved an unhurried atmosphere at the ceremony itself—though the padre admitted at luncheon afterwards that his ride from Bwana M'kubwa had reminded him strongly of a former experience with an earthquake.

The sole flaw anywhere occurred when Dorothy and I emerged from the door at the end of the livingroom opposite the altar, for the start of the service. We had kept the gown and veil a close secret, to be sprung at this psychological moment on a dazzled assembly—the most acutely dazzled member of which was, of course, supposed to be Douglas. But the padre had meanwhile stationed Douglas so that he faced the altar, and thus presented to my outraged gaze, not the admiring countenance I had confidently expected to see, but a neat, impersonal British back. I am sure that any American bride would have shared my impulse to kick and scream, though perhaps it worked out for the best after all; indignation has a very bracing effect on knees that are somewhat inclined to wobble.

A holiday was due neither of us at the time, and work on the mine was too pressing to allow of a special leave being taken, even for a wedding trip. We had a day in which to move our things from Douglas's rondavel, and from my room in the Irwins' temporary house, to a smart, five-room bungalow on Funyama Avenue.

So that my single life, and the first phase of the one I had found in Rhodesia, ended, appropriately, together.



## Occupation: Mama



THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT white man in Rhodesia takes on stature every time his servant addresses him as Bwana—Master; the most important male member of any European community being known generally and impressively as the Bwana M'kubwa—Master, the Great One. In the case of a white woman, the whole process is rather in reverse. There may be a coziness about being addressed as Mama, but there is little grandeur; and no matter what social or executive importance a woman may achieve outside, she remains Mama at home.

She acquires her title automatically with acquisition of her domestic staff, which was, in the copperfields, invariably male—early marriage and frequent child-bearing making it impossible for the totally unemancipated native woman to go out to work.

Though the mine found it difficult at first to fill its tremendous requirements for industrial native labour, there was never, from the beginning, a dearth of potential domestics. Every white woman to arrive at the Roan was at once surrounded by a flock of applicants, who, to her startled eyes,

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appeared to rise from the ground, spring from the anthills, and fall from the trees.

Twenty-five stood in our back yard the morning after our arrival, representing, we came in time to know, a number of different tribes. But they were all fairly small in stature and slight in build. All their heads were so closely shaven as to appear almost bald. Their faces, to our unaccustomed eyes, looked too much alike to distinguish individual, let alone tribal, characteristics. The most noticeable difference between them lay in skin colouring, which ranged from mahogany to ebony.

Their ages, too, were hard to judge, beyond that they all looked to be between fifteen and perhaps twenty-two. We found later that a good many were considerably older; but the typical Northern Rhodesian native never seems to look middle-aged. He looks very young for a long time, with his smooth, beardless skin and generally round cast of countenance. Then, when his eyes eventually take on a yellowish, opaque look, and his hair at last turns grey, he looks very old. But there are seldom any old natives in a European community in Rhodesia; to see them it is necessary to visit a bush village.

There wasn't a hat or a pair of shoes among the crowd in our yard; most of the sketchy bodily clothing gave the effect of having been donned in a brief fit of absent-mindedness. Shirts hung outside of shorts, or a loincloth; or a coat was worn with no shirt under it. There were several sacks, with holes cut for arms and legs, several loose white garments that hung to the knees like night-shirts. A cherry-coloured silk blouse of feminine design stands out as vividly in my memory now as it stood out that day against the coal-black skin of its wearer. Another member of the group had on an old-fashioned corset

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cover, with a piece of coarse twine run through the rows of eyelet holes at neck and waist.

They all huddled in front of the big anthill that occupied the side of the back yard opposite the kitchen. Occasionally two exchanged a few words, or a set of remarkably white teeth flashed in a brief smile. For the most part they stood quietly, arms folded or hanging limply, and rolled solemn and rather anxious eyes toward the house. We felt solemn and anxious ourselves as we surveyed them from behind a sheltering window curtain; and oppressed by the necessity for going out and selecting a domestic staff from among them. They didn't look in the least domestic. Nor, on the other hand, did they look, in their pathetic travesties of European apparel, like anything so dignified as tribesmen.

We were having our first look at the strange hybrid tribesmen become when they leave their bush villages for European settlements. We were having our first look at the people who were about to turn us into Mamas. We were having our first look at Rhodesian boys.

A neighbour fortunately came over at this point to see if she could help us. With her brisk assistance, Dorothy was shortly equipped with a cook boy, two house boys, a wash boy, and a garden boy. A ten-year-old piccannin, produced a little later by the cook, completed the staff.

It seemed a large one for such a small house, but we soon found that its size was necessary. Primitive conditions created a great deal of extra work, and training one boy in a single set of duties was about all one Mama could hope to accomplish. A few of the boys available in those days had learned something about domestic work in a European settlement or

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a mission school. A great many had never before been inside a European house, and were completely and quite honestly baffled by its simplest appointments. At the end of a month Dorothy was still supervising Jacob in his daily bed-making. Perceiving no logic in the order in which the clothes went on, he had to memorize it slowly and painfully. The same mental process accompanied the setting of the table and other routine matters.

The woman who helped Dorothy choose her staff had been in the country long enough to judge the boys largely by their faces. This we found eventually to be the best method, though every boy who had worked before carried with him a small blank book, in which former employers had inscribed their comments on his ability. But, as governmental regulation forbade the writing of anything really derogatory in these books—the simple absence of comment was considered sufficiently damning, without entering into crude details—they did not mean as much as they might have. Embittered and resourceful employers, however, sometimes found in implication a powerful medium of expression.

‘Knife worked for me five weeks,’ read one book plaintively; ‘it seemed like five years.’

‘Shilling is too honest to steal a red-hot stove.’

‘This boy’s name is Time; he takes it.’

‘Table’s name really ought to be Ananias.’

The illiterate possessor of such a book exhibited it with touching faith in its power to get him a job, though he must have wondered vaguely sometimes why it never seemed to do so. He learned in time; with a general growing sophistication among the boys their books became even less reliable. Lacking

### Occupation: Mama

a good one of his own, a job seeker simply borrowed one, or hired an educated friend to write him a few choice recommendations.

The strange nomenclature adopted by the boys for use in European communities was a result of difficulty experienced by early settlers in remembering or pronouncing native names—a difficulty intensified by the strong similarity between those in a single tribe.

To the average Northern Rhodesian tribesman himself the use of a different name was quite an ordinary procedure. He had long known that such a change might improve his bad health, or make his marriage more productive, or affect his fortune favourably in other ways. He had always adopted a name for temporary use when he went among members of a strange tribe. Even in his own group, only his closest relatives knew his *real* name—the one he had been given at birth and that was consequently an integral part of himself. In an enemy's hands, of course, this could be used with devastating effect in the working against him of witchcraft. Just as cuttings of his hair or fingernails could be used, if they were left lying carelessly about. Two friends, swearing eternal brotherhood, exchanged their final pledge of confidence when each revealed to the other his own secret name.

So when the tribesman became a boy in a European community, he took a new name quite cheerfully—perhaps a Biblical one, if he had been to mission school, occasionally the name of a favourite employer. But his fancy was far more apt to be caught by the sound of some common English noun, the use of which was often grotesque in the extreme from Mama's point of view. As when she asked Cabbage to boil some cab-

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age for dinner, or tried to express annoyance with Sugar or Honey. Pairs of names were sometimes adopted by brothers or unies: Whisky and Soda, Cigarette and Matches, Bride and Room, even Malaria and Quinine.

The combined wages of the whole Rhodesian staff hardly came up to the amount paid a single competent servant in New York's suburban area. The cook started at about \$7.50 a month, the piccannin at \$2.50, with the rest ranging between. Mama gave each one fourteen pounds of mealie meal every Saturday, and a shilling with which to buy meat. The meat allowance was more generous than it sounds, for a touch of richness in meat was considered rather more desirable than otherwise; and from this broad viewpoint a boy could make his shilling go a long way at the butcher shop. And if the wages seemed low, it should be remembered that they were clear. Mama provided her boys with uniforms, and the company furnished their living quarters. While we were in the old camp they had lived in the company compound; in the township neat brick servants' quarters were set at the foot of each back yard.

The housing of the single men's boys, incidentally, caused the company a good deal of embarrassment. At first, when there were only a few of them, they, too, lived in the company compound. As their numbers approached the thousand mark, however, this became impractical, nor was it desirable to put so many additional servants' quarters in the new township.

To the American management there seemed one obvious way out of the difficulty. A single man, living in a rondavel or dormitory room, and eating in a mess, really did not need a

### Occupation: *Mama*

personal boy. For cleaning and laundry work, one servant could easily take care of a large group of men.

The suggestion, put forward tentatively, caused general consternation in the single quarters. What, no personal boy? In Rhodesia? Good God—!

. . . Arrangements were made by the company to house the single men's boys in the government township compound.

Mama's first official act was the dispatch of her whole staff for measurement by the native tailor at one of the trading stores. The Rhodesian domestic uniform most prevalent at the time of our arrival was the loose, knee-length affair we had seen on several of Dorothy's applicants and which gave the general impression that its wearer was about to go either to heaven or to bed. This gave way shortly to a smarter-looking drill or khaki tunic, buttoned up to the throat, and worn over either shorts or long trousers. Feet were always left bare—it was, in fact, considered an impertinence in Rhodesia for a boy to enter his employer's house in shoes.

With her staff hired and outfitted, Mama's career was fairly launched. It was, in the early copperbelt days, a lively one. Her first obstacle to understanding with her boys was presented in the language situation. Few boys, in those days, spoke any English at all. To do them justice, they were remarkably quick at picking a little up—an advantage which was subsequently offset by the fact that they seldom, even in years, picked up more than a little.

Mama always began by using copious gesticulation and pidgin English, the latter spoken loudly, with the Anglo-Saxon's incurable belief that sufficient loudness *must*, somehow, be effective. During this phase she found it hard to address even

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her husband without a great deal of supplementary pantomime, and to refrain at dinner from asking her neighbour to 'please pass salt.'

The boy who had his smattering of English was sometimes more difficult to deal with than those who spoke none, for his pride in his own linguistic accomplishment made him extremely reluctant to admit that he did not understand everything that was said to him. His 'Yes, Mama—sure, Mama' was, too often, sadly misleading.

Planning a picnic in the bush one Sunday, Dorothy spent a good half-hour instructing Cook, a boy whose name appropriately indicated his occupation, about the lunch he was to put up. Cook smiled agreeably, nodded intelligently, and ushered her out of the kitchen on a flood of 'Yes, Mama's.' When the time came to start, however, there was no lunch, and Cook's surprise at finding that Dorothy wanted one was fully as intense as was hers at discovering that he had not prepared it.

'But, Cook,' cried Dorothy, in bewilderment and pidgin English, 'what you think I telling you this morning?'

'Mama telling me,' replied Cook earnestly, 'she going by bush yesterday.'

It behooved Mama to add Kitchen Kaffir to her own repertoire with all possible speed. Kitchen Kaffir is a bastard and fearsome tongue, which knows few rules of grammar or construction. Words from the native dialects used all over southern Africa are strung together, with others taken bodily from English, Afrikaans, Portuguese and French. Fortunately, however, its very simplicity makes a working knowledge of it fairly easy to acquire.





Though its foreign insertions are often distorted, they are usually recognizable, so that out of a sentence a keyword may be snatched at gratefully. *Lo baffwa*—the bath water. *Lo taful*—the table. *Lo foluk*—the fork. *Saut*—salt. *Lo enflup*—the letter. *Lo push*—the cat. *Lo millik*—the milk. *Kuka*—cook. And so on. A handful of native contributions are in constant demand: *Sebenza*—work. *Leta*—bring. *Tata*—take. *Hamba*—go. *Ikona*—no. *Ya*—yes. *Lo kia*—the house. And, of course, the inevitable *checha!*—hurry!

Generalization about the Rhodesian boys is as precarious a business as is generalization about any other people. Like other people, they varied widely in the degree to which they possessed every human trait. There were, nevertheless, certain marked similarities in their performance as domestics; there were certain sorts of experiences shared by every Mama, whether she had very good boys or very bad ones.

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Every staff of boys could, at times, reduce its Mama to rage or tears or hysterical laughter. Every staff could fill the gentlest, most soft-voiced Mama with a periodic and irresistible impulse to utter the screams of a fishwife. Every staff could obsess the most well-balanced Mama's mind until she lost, in company, both the will and the wit to speak on any other subject. Every staff was able, at times, to reduce the domestic scene to something closely resembling Old Home Week in the madhouse.

Grasp of instructions, in the first place, was never a guarantee that they would be carried out. The ability to forget amounted, in even the best-intentioned boy, to something like genius. Special instructions slipped his mind five minutes after he had heard them; he could forget, without any trouble at all, three or four pieces of his routine work every day.

The cook never remembered that the salt or the sugar, or some other vital ingredient was 'finish, Mama,' until the daily shopping list had gone off to the trading store; the most frequent type of chit that Mama had to write, consequently, was one requesting a neighbour to lend her, until tomorrow, a little of the missing commodity. No boy ever remembered to boil the drinking water—a thing that had to be done until the company's purification plant was built—until Mama, or some other member of the family, wanted a drink. This omission always entailed a long wait, while the water was boiled, poured into canvas bags, and hung on the back verandah to cool by evaporation. The English part of the community was happily able to quench its thirst with tea, but the discovery of an empty water bag on her return home from a hot game of tennis made it hard for an American Mama to remember that she was supposed to be a lady as well.

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If a boy remembered to do his duty, he often forgot how it should be done. Dorothy's Jacob, at the end of a year, occasionally varied the bed-making routine by putting the blankets or the counterpane on first. Every table boy, at some time or other, marched into the diningroom bearing the sweets course before the meat, or perhaps the entrée, had been served.

The performance of duty was always maddeningly slow, but this did not prevent havoc from following in its wake. A broken cup or plate was usually the result of an hour devoted to washing up a few tea things. A morning's desultory cleaning could easily demolish a couple of vases, or even crack the leg of a table. The slowest house boy in my memory of a long procession of slow house boys—one who gave the distinct impression of having reached the last stages of hookworm—broke the solid iron frame one day when he made my bed up, an operation that seldom took him less than half an hour.

The laundry method preferred by the wash boys forms an excellent case in point. It consisted in wetting the object of attention thoroughly, twisting it into a thick rope, and patiently beating the dirt out on a rock. Occasionally the procedure was varied slightly by placing the wadded-up article on a rock, and administering the interminable pounding with a heavy stick. Though every *Mama* provided boards, tubs, and soap, and loudly urged their use on the wash boy, the linen often bore silent witness to the fact that he had discarded these pieces of foreign equipment in favour of his own more destructive, and infinitely more laborious, mode of attack.

It was not forgetfulness or even slowness that affected one branch of the Rhodesian housework most strongly. The boys, on the whole, displayed a humble willingness to accept *Mama's*

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decrees, peculiar as some of them might be, and to carry them out to the best of their ability. But they simply could not understand her excitement over cold greasy dishwater and slimy grey cloths. Over the occasional use of the latter as a food strainer. Over garbage dumped on the ground because it was too much trouble to take the lid off the pail and put it inside. Over pots and pans, pushed far back on kitchen shelves, containing remnants of food in varying stages of decay. Over the cockroaches and the smells that such remnants bred. Over a cleaning technique all over the house that merely stirred up a cloud of dust and allowed it to settle back again quietly.

Their whole attitude toward the broad subject of cleanliness and sanitation was summed up neatly and finally by a house boy to whom I once handed a greasy knife he had set at my place on the dinner table.

'Not clean, Pencil,' I remarked severely.

Pencil took the knife and regarded it with an interested and co-operative air. Under my fascinated gaze he then bent over, wiped the blade carefully on the calf of his bare leg, and handed it back to me.

'Clean now, Mama,' he said, in a voice that rang with nothing but the simple sincerity of his desire to please.

The one thing that galvanized every boy into violent activity was a break in his regular daily routine. This had its fortunate and its less fortunate side. Meeting the cold, annoyed, or long-suffering look of some current domestic, I often think with regret of the pleased excitement radiating from a Rhodesian staff when the imminence of guests at dinner was announced. If the excitement too often resulted in a chaotic preparation and service of the meal, the pleasure went a long way toward

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making up for it. Particularly when the consumption of pre-dinner sundowners was frequently the cause of the function's being delayed anywhere from one to three hours, keeping the boys at work sometimes until long after midnight.

Any sort of crisis met with a response as heroic as it was capable of being disconcerting. As when we came home for lunch one day, to find that Matches had devoted the morning to chopping down the only tree in our yard—the tree which had influenced our choice of a house in a township practically denuded of trees—because Cicero, the monkey, had escaped and clambered into its highest branches. The issue at stake, of course, was the restoration of Cicero to Mama, and no one could deny that Cicero was now restored . . .

'Is nice, Mama?' asked Matches, rhetorically, the conscious pride of achievement in his voice.

'Is nice, Matches,' I replied gratefully, turning my eyes resolutely away from the fallen tree, the demolished flower beds and the now completely unshaded yard. 'Is very nice.'

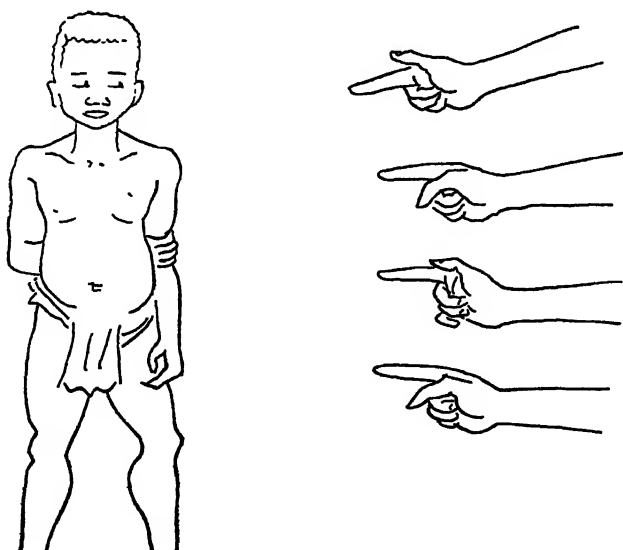
And there was the time when Dorothy's Cigarette found, after our departure on a Sunday picnic, that we had left the lunch at home. Emptying the contents of the neatly packed but too bulky basket into a pillow case, Cigarette leaped on his bicycle and pedalled furiously after us. Mayonnaise, coffee, chicken, pickles, eggs, sandwiches, and cake were intimately mingled on arrival at the picnic ground—but Cigarette had ridden ten miles, in the hot sun, and on his day off, to carry his message to Garcia.

Whenever a dish was broken, or any other domestic crime committed, the real reason for the piccannin's presence in the household was revealed. Mama might think he was there to

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run errands and make himself generally helpful, particularly to the cook, who was usually the boss boy of the establishment and didn't want the fact to be forgotten. The boys, however, knew better; to them the piccannin's true function lay in acting as official scapegoat. When any sort of damage occurred, 'Who did this?' was a purely rhetorical question; 'Lo piccannin, Mama,' its prompt and invariable reply.

No boy, of course, really expected Mama to believe the statement, and persistence sent him back to his second line of defence. This involved a long recital, delivered in a low, dramatic sing-song. It covered a range of time beginning hours, sometimes days, before the event under discussion had taken place. It touched on personalities and incidents that seemed as remote as the moon from the case in point, and it wound up with what sounded like a general summary of the theory of fatalism. The catastrophe, Mama gathered, could scarcely have been averted, when circumstances and men, fates and gods, had joined in a giant conspiracy to break a particular cup, or



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to burn a hole in a certain tablecloth. It was plainly unreasonable to feel that one small weak individual could possibly have prevented the thing from happening.

Well, it had happened now, and a thoroughly confused and baffled Mama was usually ready to let the subject drop. The boys, on the whole, were truthful enough, though truth in Africa, where so many subjects are regarded obliquely and modified by all sorts of considerations, is not the arbitrary, cut-and-dried matter that we are apt to consider it. From their own point of view the boys seldom told an outright lie; such a statement as the one about the piccannin was merely a conventional formula, so recognized by everyone concerned.

To ask a direct question of people who themselves dealt so largely in indirection, was not, in any case, a very sensible procedure. One factor that always had a bearing on an answer to Mama was a pleasant and perfectly sincere desire on her boys' part to add to her pleasure, or at least maintain her amiability, by telling her what they thought she would like to be told. This was good manners in a land where asking abrupt questions was not.

The boys' standard of honesty was remarkably high when the meagreness of their personal possessions was considered in contrast with the things to be found in the simplest European establishment. Only a rare individual ever stole money, though a good many found it hard to resist the allure of coffee, sugar, bacon, liquor, cigarettes, soap, and tallow candles. They did not, incidentally, wish to spread sweetness and light around them with soap and candles, but to produce, by rubbing, a pleasing high polish on their already shiny dark skins.

With his fundamental naïveté so thinly covered by a veneer

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of sophistication, the occasional boy who embarked deliberately on a career of crime was apt to cut a figure more ludicrous and pathetic than anything else.

A trio at the Roan once worked out a scheme for amassing easy wealth. Two of them, who were domestic servants, were to rob convenient European houses systematically; the third, Pudding by name, worked in a Kaffir trading store in the government township, and was to sell the loot across his employer's counter, though without, of course, the latter's knowledge. Final cash proceeds were to be split evenly between the three.

The scheme worked beautifully, until the time for financial settlement came. Then Pudding, who held the strategic advantage of being in actual possession of the proceeds, declined firmly to part with any of them.

To the District Officer's court next morning hastened his two chagrined accomplices. Into the District Officer's ear they poured their story, in faithful and minute detail, concluding with an urgent request that their perfidious associate be forced to give them their fair share of the spoils.

'Work we doing is hard, Bwana,' summed up the spokesman plaintively. 'For going inside many houses in night time, for taking all things to Pudding in store. For selling in store is not trouble for Pudding. But he is keeping money—all, all money. That is not right. You see, Bwana, how that is not right?'

In the handling of their legitimate finances the boys were in an almost constant state of confusion. Though domestic wages were invariably paid in cash every Saturday, the simple operation nevertheless required intensive bookkeeping on Mama's part. She was always puzzled, at first, to understand why al-



### Occupation: *Mama*

most every member of her staff, immediately after payday, needed an advance on next week's wages. She soon found, however, that the requests were a regular routine, occasioned because a single boy, in turn each week, was handed the wages of all the others, to hasten his purchase, on the instalment plan, of a bicycle, a sewing machine, a gramophone, or a new suit of clothes.

The bicycle always came first, for, though his riding was seldom anything but extremely erratic, this was an article that roused what can only be described as a passion in the breast of every boy who came to the copperfields.

Though the boys who supplied messenger service for the company cannot legitimately be described as domestics, they nevertheless produced a domestic atmosphere in the offices by turning all feminine employees into *Mamas* there as well as at home. And they must be mentioned here, for it was in them that the bicycle mania reached its epitome.

Messenger work was the most popular form of employment offered by the company, for it enabled a boy to top a smart khaki uniform with a round khaki cap bearing the company's initials in large red letters. It also enabled him to rest between errands on one of the boxes ranged in a row along the office verandah, where he could be called handily through the window by the European workers inside.

The office boys, however, did not use their boxes as frequently as might have been expected, nor did they often answer the time-honoured Rhodesian shout of 'Boy!' until it had been repeated several times, on a steeply rising key. The explanation lay in the final and most vital thing that endeared

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office work to the boys' hearts—the half dozen bicycles the company had supplied for its messengers to use.

Over the office bicycles the office boys hovered almost incessantly, oiling them, blowing up the tires, or merely fondling various parts of the mechanism affectionately. Their mental state while they were so occupied was one of deep hypnosis, rendering them deaf to anything but the most frantic feminine cries or stentorian masculine shouts.

The boy who at long last answered the call invariably mounted a bicycle, even if his errand were only to take him fifty yards, and, after several false starts and a good deal of help from his associates, wobbled proudly but precariously off.

An office boy named Bell, who was assigned to my special use, was the only one I remember who did not devote himself almost exclusively to the company bicycles—which allowed him time to act on a private feeling of his own. Bell's feeling was that as I was a person who dealt so largely in letters, it would be improper to address me in any other way. Though the box on which he awaited my orders rested just outside the window beside which my desk stood, Bell always laboriously wrote down anything he had to say to me, and then padded silently into the room on his bare feet to lay his missive down by my typewriter.

'Please have mercy on me,' read my favourite communication from Bell. 'From that time you told me to put ink in the Bwana M'kubwa office, I found the bottle of ink is empty, but very few drops. This is argument which make me to invite you that you may be unremember to get some new bottle of ink.'

Occupation: *Mama*

'So may God bless you daily and show you many lovely donations in this great world.'

The whole mental range displayed by the boys was not very wide, for even in its highest form their intelligence was like the still undeveloped intelligence of a bright child who is always capable of doing things from time to time that seem to adults excessively stupid.

Mentality without any question reached its lowest level in the garden boys—touching rock bottom in the first one Dorothy employed after our arrival at the Roan. Garden boys, as a rule, came from a tribe's lowest social order; no boy who possessed either pride or ambition would ever dream of accepting outside domestic work. This prejudice was partly based on a feeling that outside work was demeaning, partly on the fact that it was physically harder than inside. Beside digging, watering, weeding, and so on, in the garden, the garden boy brought in firewood from the bush, chopped it up, and performed a number of other odd jobs about the premises. Like the *piccannin*, he was seldom addressed by name, largely because he did not often stay in one job very long at a time. For this reason he was usually the only member of the staff who was not put into uniform, a circumstance which usually enabled him to add the rôle of scarecrow to his gardening repertoire.

For some time Dorothy found it impossible to inoculate her first garden boy with the idea of regularity in the matter of watering the flower beds. He was perfectly willing to water—once the can was put in his hand he would continue to use it until it was later taken away. But the next time he had to be set in motion all over again, like a mechanical toy of some sort.

About two weeks elapsed before light finally dawned on this

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lad's mental horizon; the afternoon he actually got the can out for himself Dorothy said she felt rather like a mother whose backward offspring has at last taken its first epoch-making notice of something.

Some two weeks later still the rainy season opened.

While the first thunderstorm was in violent progress one afternoon we leaped to the window in some alarm to see if a terrific bolt of lightning had struck nearby—and promptly forgot all about our original objective as we gazed in frozen fascination at a more arresting sight than any devastation by act of God could have created.

There, in the centre of the garden, stood a familiar figure. Through the driving sheets of rain it was shadowy, insubstantial. But the pose was unmistakable; from it we knew that the garden boy's lips, as usual, were slightly parted, that his gaze, as usual, was directed into some private vacuum of his own. In one hand he held a battered umbrella. With the other he directed the spout of his can over a pool that had lately been a bed of petunias. The garden boy was busy watering the garden.



### *Occupation: Mama*

Before I had grasped the lowliness of the social position among his fellows occupied by this particular employee, a garden boy who once worked for Douglas and me came down with malaria. By the second afternoon of his absence the flowers had begun to wilt and droop, and it was plain that someone must come to their rescue if they were to survive at all. It was the house boy's afternoon off, watering in the township was done, painlessly, with a hose, and Matches had always taken over the house boy's work in an emergency with the utmost cheerfulness. The idea that he might not be an equally cheerful substitute in the garden simply never occurred to me. I blithely asked him to water and then hurried out to keep a tennis engagement.

On my return I was pleased to find the flowers looking greatly revived, but my pleasure did not last long. In the house I encountered a figure which might well have served as a model for a dark-skinned tragic muse. Matches greeted me by tendering his resignation in a trembling voice; as he went on, in answer to my dismayed questions, to explain his action, tears began to roll down his thin brown cheeks.

The combination of my bewilderment and his emotion made explanations difficult; it was some time before I realized that by asking him to water the garden I had heartlessly exposed him to the contempt of every member of his race who had passed our house that afternoon. He had placed a towel over his head, but this had not been large enough adequately to cover his shame. Every acquaintance who knew him as my cook and boss boy must have thought that I had some potent reason for wishing to visit him with dire punishment. Every stranger must have thought that he was, actually, my garden boy.

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When Matches reached this last ghastly aspect of the affair the final vestige of control deserted him, and he sobbed aloud. It was impossible, he concluded presently, for him to stay any longer in a community which had witnessed his public humiliation; he proposed to return at once to his home village, in the seclusion of which he would try to forget the whole shattering experience.

My own condition was almost as shattered by the time I had persuaded him to stay; it is probably superfluous to add that I never asked him to do anything in the garden again.

That our culinary standard in the early copperbelt days was not higher was not entirely the cook's fault, though a cook who could neither read a recipe nor retain a memory of oral instructions, if he understood them, was not an ideal person to have in the kitchen. Nor had a home diet of half-cooked mealie meal—supplemented occasionally by a few sweet potatoes or monkey nuts, a piece of dried venison or some mud fish, a mess of locusts, caterpillars or flying ants—developed a palate capable of judging the seasoning of European food.

Mama could, of course, go into the kitchen and put the cook through the same sort of daily repetitious training that she was giving the rest of her staff, but the kitchens with their wood-burning stoves were intensely hot, even in the township houses, and it required courage and physical stamina, as well as patience, to do this. The boys usually mastered the regulation of the stove more readily than Mama herself did; the bush wood burned too fast in the dry season when it was pithy and brittle, and was suddenly reluctant to burn at all during the rains.

In assembling the materials for her meals lay at least half of

### Occupation: Mama

Mama's troubles in the culinary department, nor were most of these troubles done away with by the move into the new township.

Supplemented by an occasional shopping trip to Ndola, Mama bought her groceries at the local trading stores, which were first out on the Ndola road and later in the government township. Three of the original stores were general in character, the fourth was a butcher shop. It was not possible, of course, for small, general shops that sold clothing, hardware, dry goods, stationery, notions, and liquor as well, to carry an extensive stock of groceries. The matter of replenishment was always uncertain, too, with only two trains a week from the south, and the frequent occurrence, during the rainy season, of a washout on the line. I have long treasured a clipping from a Rhodesian newspaper, which presents another rather novel aspect of the transport situation:

'A swarm of locusts, thirteen miles long and seven inches deep (the width has not yet been determined) is delaying traffic on the railway line between Wankie and Victoria Falls.

"The drainage cuttings along the line are full of hoppers, three feet deep. On Wednesday the Kaffir mail took two and a half hours longer than usual to traverse the section, and this morning's train three hours and thirty-five minutes. There is, unfortunately, a shortage of sand en route.

'Locusts on the line make the wheels of an engine greasy, so that sand has to be used to give a grip. A big swarm depletes the sand supply. On uphill sections of the line, trains have sometimes been brought to a standstill by locusts, despite the continued application of sand.'

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Another paper, reporting the same incident, added plaintively:

'In the Union a train was once held up through some treacle leaking on to the line out of a goods truck, and it is not unknown for a particularly strong headwind to bring a train to a standstill. Further north, large quadrupeds, such as hippo, rhino, buffalo, and elephant sometimes interfere with the passage of trains.'

Another interesting reason why stocks were not always up to par came to light one day when I asked a trader for a popular brand of cigarette. He replied bitterly that he'd given up keeping it because it sold out too fast.

The long rail haul from the south did not entirely account for the appalling price of most of the groceries. Rhodesian traders, always ready to comply with the airy request, 'Put it down,' were in a constant state of having to recoup the resulting bad debts. Willingness to put anything down to anyone's account represented a hang-over from the days when prospectors were almost the only European customers Rhodesian traders ever had. Prospectors, who seldom possessed a shilling in cash, but who were always on the point of turning up a fortune in gold.

About ninety percent of the meat carried by the butcher shop was beef, with an occasional piece of mutton thrown in; and all of it was eaten practically on the hoof. The animals involved were raised in the Lusaka district, some hundred and fifty miles down the railway line, and, as there were no refrigerator cars on the trains in those days, they were shipped up for local butchering. This had to be done at once because of their local enemy, the fly; after which a general lack of ade-



### Occupation: Mama

quate refrigeration made it imperative that no time be lost between the passage of the meat from slaughterhouse to table.

Anything except stew meat, which was simply allowed to simmer sullenly all day, had to be subjected to heavy pounding, which broke down at least some of the resistance of the tough fibres. But neither this treatment, nor the protracted cooking of the stew, ever entirely removed the impression that the contributing animal must have perished of old age or exhaustion, following an extended walking tour of the continent. Embittered Mamas at the Roan were scarcely surprised to learn at one time that several 'salted' trek oxen, which the company had just finished using on a strenuous hauling job, had supplied the butcher shop with its entire stock of meat for a week.

The butchering was done on a plan understood only by the local butcher, a member, I am sure, of some other profession. The choicest cut of beef, designated as 'fillet' looked rather like a fragment that an absent-minded lion might have torn from a round steak.

The Bwana, of course, was able to furnish Mama occasionally with a piece of venison. If this came from one of the smaller antelope, it was the best meat available. The flesh of most of the larger buck was strong in flavour, and was even more resistant to cooking than the beef, since its host had led an even more active life than that enjoyed by domestic cattle.

Once in a while the butcher shop had a few fowls; and natives from bush villages came in from time to time with chickens to sell. The latter always required a good deal of fattening, a programme to which a weasel, a jackal, or perhaps a leopard might at any moment put an end. A dozen trading store eggs, costing as much as three or four shillings in off seasons, usually

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contained a dud or two. Eggs from a native village were consistently cheaper—though here allowance had to be made for the patience with which the proprietor of a single laying hen had waited for a round dozen to accumulate.

It was the custom of each trading store at the Roan to send a boy around camp every morning on a bicycle to collect shopping lists. He carried with him a single, large blank book in which Mama wrote her order for the day. While this system saved a long walk in the sun or rain, and afforded an interesting insight into the contents of other Mamas' pantries, it was not without its drawbacks. When something listed was out of stock, the fact did not become apparent until the delivery boy and his wheelbarrow trundled along some time during the afternoon. Every now and then a general field day occurred, when the delivery boy deposited all the orders at the wrong houses.

To an American Mama the dispatch of written orders entailed a further difficulty—the question of how to indicate in English or Rhodesian the article she wanted. Her entire vocabulary had to be adjusted to a land that knew cans as tins, molasses as treacle, candy as sweets, sweets as dessert, crackers as biscuits, biscuits as scones, corn as mealie, sorghum as Kaffir corn, peanuts as monkey nuts, kerosene as paraffin, paraffin as candle grease, gasoline as petrol, cheesecloth as butter-muslin, burlap as Hessian, calico as limbo, napkins as serviettes, and so on ad infinitum.

Ordering a box of sweet crackers one June day, I received a large case of the Christmas variety of cracker, which is pulled at each end, producing an explosion followed by a paper cap. Taking this dusty left-over down from his shelf, a Rhodesian

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trader must, for once, have sent sincere thanks to heaven for the outlandish ideas entertained by Americans.

Pending the ultimate development of local truck farms, the company helped Mama out with one of her problems by running a vegetable garden, which was irrigated by water pumped from the underground mine workings, and was located in the Luanshya dambo, just below Society Row.

Three times a week a vegetable issue took place, to which Mama sent her piccannin, armed with a market basket. If she were of optimistic nature, she also gave the piccannin a chit to Mr. Williams, the gardener, setting forth a list of the vegetables she would like to receive. It was always safe to let fancy have free rein in compiling such a list—Mr. Williams, untroubled by it, simply returned a few specimens of whatever vegetables he had on hand for the day.

Mr. Williams almost always had potatoes and onions, and usually one other item—string beans, peas, mealies, cabbage, squash, vegetable marrow or tomatoes. These should have furnished a fair variety, except that each one occurred singly, in a long run; once we had marrow for so many successive dinners that we developed an uneasy feeling that the table was being haunted by this unattractive vegetable. Only scant consolation was derived from the thought that every other table in camp was similarly haunted too.

Mr. Williams never had to send more than a few specimens of each of his products, for he had once been a substantial prize-winner at an agricultural show in South Africa, and the experience had left him with a fixed determination to pick no vegetable that had not reached phenomenal proportions. A

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dozen of his string beans could fill a serving dish; the smallest Williams cabbage would have dwarfed a basketball.

The garden boy's first duty every morning was to go to the company ice-plant and fetch home the daily allotment of ice with which Mama valiantly strove to keep perishables from perishing. The plant was operated largely for the benefit of the hospital, which meant that the product available for domestic use varied with the varying requirements of that institution.

Never more than a few pounds at best, a domestic allotment was almost always reduced still further before it went into service. After the garden boy had finished gossiping with all the other garden boys, he strolled home with it, only half wrapped in the piece of sacking Mama had provided for the purpose, on his head. Unless Mama were there to act as a personal reception committee, he was then apt to put it down in the sun, while he himself rested from the exertion of the walk. Whatever fraction of ice survived the ordeal was eventually placed in a home-made wooden ice-box—if the Bwana of the household happened to be handy with his tools.

(For about three years Dorothy had the only electric refrigerator on the property. But as this had been installed and was serviced by a company electrician, to whom the whole field of domestic refrigeration was a foreign one, its performance was seldom anything but erratic.)

The only ice-box a good many Mamas had was a simple tin pan. The tin-pan technique consisted in crowding all the things that most urgently needed to be kept cool around the ice in the pan, and covering them with a wet cloth. The ice would last, under these conditions, just about long enough to

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keep the butter from actually melting before dinner time. There was no need to worry about keeping this particular dairy product fresh, for it had arrived from the south with an already strong rancid flavour, somewhat complicated by the taste of the preservatives with which it had been copiously treated.

It is hard to say whether the canned-milk motif, or this peculiar one furnished by the butter, ran more persistently through those early copperbelt meals. Perhaps the milk had a slight edge, because it was in the coffee and the tea as well as in the food. Its effect on the coffee was the most depressing, though Dorothy, during our first breakfast at the Roan, gave it as her opinion that canned milk alone could not be responsible for the beverage's almost sinister flavour.

'I know what it is,' Dave Junior had said, causing us all to turn and gaze at him expectantly. Looking back now, I see that we spent a good deal of our time in those days gazing expectantly at anyone who promised to throw any light, however dim, on any detail of our strange new life. Dave Junior we all knew to be an observant boy who missed very little of what went on around him.

'When we were in Bulawayo,' he now informed us, 'I saw a can of coffee in a store window. The label said, "This coffee contains only the best chicory."'

As her hope of improving materially on the basic components of the usual family meal was practically nil in the early days, Mama's only means of raising it to the dinner party level lay in the insertion of a few extra courses. The choice of possible additions was severely limited, so that every dinner party followed a rigid formula. It began with an hors d'œuvre made chiefly of canned fish, an entrée of canned asparagus appeared

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between the soup and the roast, and a toasted cheese savoury was tacked on at the end of the meal.

With the passage of time, the domestic horizon gradually began to brighten for Mama. The railroad did, eventually, put on refrigerator cars, and increase the number of weekly trains; and local conditions improved in every way with the development of the whole copperfields district. Cooks who could really be called cooks began to emerge from the general culinary chaos; house boys and wash boys and even garden boys appeared, who actually knew how to do their respective jobs.

The wonder, I suppose, lay in the fact that before these things happened Mama not only managed to set three meals a day before her family, but to give a great many dinner parties, with the aid of canned fish, canned asparagus, and cheese. And to run her whole house, somehow, with the aid of boys who did not know how to do anything and who still, somehow, managed to get things done.

Boys who with all their shortcomings could make Mama, when she went away, remember them with sharper nostalgia than anything else she left behind her in Rhodesia. For there is no mutual struggle that fails to establish its bond, and the early copperbelt Mama and her raw boys had, after all, gone through the wars together, together had had an experience to which the universe probably holds no parallel.

Yet the final element to be reckoned with in dealing with the Rhodesian boys was still left when all rawness had worn off. This was an element to which I find it difficult to give a name—and when I say it was to be reckoned with, I speak inaccurately, because there is no reckoning with something that is in its very nature unpredictable. I can best describe it as the

### *Occupation: Mama*

unknown quantity in his viewpoint or make-up that made the most intelligent and well-trained boy do something occasionally for which there was no possible accounting from his Mama's point of view.

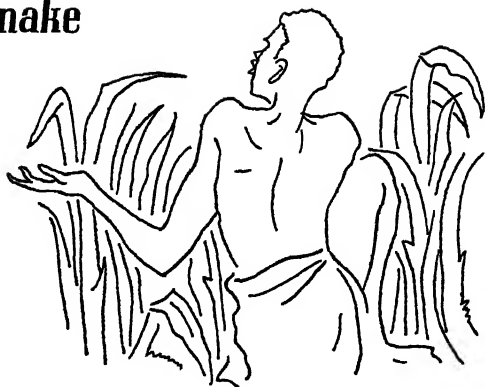
Matches' intelligence was above the average. Without his general reliability I could not have run my house at all, as I was, of course, in the office at least eight hours almost every day. He took pride in his ability as a cook, of which even by improved copperbelt standards he had a fair amount.

He had been cooking for us three years the night he left entirely untouched the other two vegetables I had provided and sent in to a dinner party three nicely prepared but precisely identical dishes of mashed potato. Something, I am sure, must suddenly have made Matches feel that, after three years of a different procedure, three dishes of mashed potato was the proper thing to serve at a dinner party, but to this day I have no idea what it was. When I questioned him later he reiterated, 'Mama not like mash potato?' with such an increasingly baffled and crestfallen air, that I realized we would never get together on the subject, and so retired, completely baffled too.

It may be, of course, that he read a sign or portent in the sky, or perhaps some mysterious god of the Achewa spoke to him of mashed potatoes that afternoon as he prepared our meal. It may be that he conceived a sudden aversion to my other vegetables, or that he simply suffered from a strange mental lapse of some sort. As the boys themselves were fond of inquiring: 'Who knows, Mama?'

Who, indeed, knows?

## *Laugh of a Snake*



THE MANAGER was loudly giving his morning's dictation—loudly, because his voice had to compete with the medley of sound that poured in through the open windows of the office advertising the widespread activity going on outside. The Manager had been summarizing the recent progress of that activity in his monthly report to the London Office; and now brought the report to a close with a few remarks under 'Native Labour':

'You know how much our ability to keep the construction and development work on the mine up to schedule depends on our being able to maintain an adequate force of native labour. The job has now advanced and expanded to the point where our labour requirements grow larger almost daily; as they will until the peak of the development programme has been reached and passed.

'I regret to report that we did not, during the month under review, sign on as many new boys as we needed. The Balamba, who occupy the country immediately surrounding the copper-fields, have, for the past two years, formed the chief source of labour supply for all the Rhodesian mines. But our own agents



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covering Lamba territory have recently encountered certain difficulty in getting members of that tribe to come to the Roan. I trust that our efforts to overcome this difficulty will shortly be successful, and that next month's report will show a satisfactory increase in our native payroll.'

The dulness of an engineering report could be really monumental, I decided a little later, as I typed the closing sentences of this one, and thought of the colourful things that lay behind them.

One of the oldest, most potent emotions in the world was involved first—the fear of *imfwiti*, evil spirits, that constantly harassed the people of Africa. The innumerable small fears of small *imfwiti*, that were always overshadowed by a consuming fear of a great and powerful tribal *imfwiti*—a creature which took different, fantastic form in the lore of each native group. There was the Door Post Animal of the Awemba. The White Leopard of the Barotse. And the one that had recently become important to the Roan—the Snake of the Balamba.

The Balamba's Snake was said to make its home in water, where it could lie hidden, its presence unsuspected by any tribesmen who lived close by. Until one day it would suddenly rear up out of the water to balance itself on the tip end of its tail, with its great length reaching high in the air, and to utter, of all strange reptilian sounds, a laugh. It was a malignant and a terrible sound, as well as a strange one—because whenever the Snake reared from the water like that, and laughed, a member of the Lamba tribe died.

The Snake had been brought into local prominence last month, when a labour agent from one of the other mines had begun telling the Balamba out in the bush villages that the

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creature had taken up its abode in the Luanshya River, which of course made the Roan a very dangerous place for Lamba boys to go. He had thus been persuading Lamba boys who had already signed up for work at the Roan to change their minds and go to his mine instead.

Registering a vigorous protest with the other mine, we had recently been assured that its agent had been severely reprimanded and given a choice between recruiting labour ethically in the future, or not recruiting it at all.

It had been, altogether, a lively little episode—one, I felt, to which the report signally failed to do any sort of justice.

Then I thought of a group of eminent financiers gathered around a London boardroom table to consider the progress being made on their largest mining property. I thought of the august assembly suddenly confronted with the strange behaviour of a tribal *imfwiti* from Africa. And I admitted, with a regretful sigh, that there are perhaps times when dulness is best.

. . . . .

Young Lane, running his survey line through the bush outside camp a month later, was having a bad day. Through the thinned foliage of the bush trees the sun beat down with vicious intensity from an overhead sky that was clear and the colour of steel. Lane's shirt clung hotly to his burning body, his legs in the gap between shorts and stockings showed a fiery, painful red, his sun helmet pressed like a band of iron on his damp, aching forehead.

The same factor that made working conditions so unpleasant forced Lane, in common with a good many others on the mine, to work under redoubled pressure just now. It was mid-October, which meant that certain jobs must be finished before the

## *Laugh of a Snake*

start of the daily deluges that would presently both clear the atmosphere and turn ground that had been hard-baked for months into a sea of sticky mud. Clouds, foretelling the coming of the rains, were banked in ominous black masses low around the horizon, weighting the hot still air with unaccustomed moisture, weighting the human spirit with an unreasonable presage of disaster, stretching human nerves just short of the snapping point.

The state of Lane's nerves was not improved today by the conduct of his native helpers. He had six of these, all of whom seemed perversely bent on doing anything but help. First they were in his way, and then when he wanted them they weren't there at all. They handed him the wrong tools as regularly as they mislaid the right ones. They appeared incapable of understanding the simplest order, of following the most routine procedure. There was some excuse for the two raw recruits, fresh from a bush village, who had only joined the crew a few days ago. But even the more experienced four, Lane told himself bitterly, acted as if they had just been picked off trees. And they were all so slow, so interminably slow, about every move they made, every step they took.

'Checha, checha!' he had been calling over and over, in an increasing agony of nervous exasperation. 'Hurry, hurry! For God's sake, hurry!'

The final peg was driven at last on the edge of the Luanshya dambo, leaving barely time to make a start on the next scheduled job. This lay over on the camp side of the river, at some distance from the point the surveying party had now reached. Once more urging speed on his boys, Lane set off hurriedly down the dambo slope. The tall grass that covered it was brown

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and dead; a line of green rushes on its immediate banks marked the winding course of the river some two hundred yards ahead.

When he came close, Lane saw that the upcountry rains had already made a good start. The last time he had come this way, 'river' had been merely a courtesy title for a series of almost stagnant pools lying far down in the bottom of the Luanshya's narrow but deeply cut channel. It had been possible to jump the clear, shallow stream that joined one pool to another just below where Lane stood.

The muddy brown flood swirling past now would take a man a bit above the waist, Lane estimated, as he waited for the boys to straggle up behind him; it looked about thirty feet wide. Crossing today would mean a thorough soaking, but this couldn't be helped—a detour to the bridge would waste far too much time. A soaking, as a matter of fact, would be rather more pleasant than otherwise in this heat.

Exhorting the assembled crew to be careful, and to follow closely behind him, Lane descended the steep bank. After he reached the water he moved slowly; immersed rushes whipped round his legs at every step, and it was necessary to feel for a footing that could not be seen. Holes were apt to be washed out of the mud bottom in the centre of the channel; stepping into one of these might result in the loss of valuable surveying equipment.

Lane was out of the water and half way up the far bank, when he suddenly tripped and pitched forward. He caught himself on his hands, but it was enough of a fall to send several articles flying from his breast pocket and to bring a concerted giggle of pure African ecstasy from the water behind him. He collected his belongings with some difficulty, and finished the

### *Laugh of a Snake*

ascent of the bank with as much dignity as the incident had left him. At the top he turned to make sure that the equipment had come safely across.

Everything, miraculously, appeared to be in good shape; the last boy was just stepping clear of the water. Lane perceived that his accident had changed everyone's mood from sullenness to complete good humour.

'Oh well,' he thought tolerantly, his own temperature considerably reduced by the coolness of his recent immersion, 'suppose it did amuse them? Let the beggars have their bit of fun.'

He had turned to go on when a less agreeable thought struck him, and he whirled again on his heel, frowning. Yes, he was quite right, here were only five boys. Who in God's name was missing now? Moses, Pencil, Motorcar, the two new ones—it was Ticky. It would be Ticky,—usually the most reliable member of the crew, he'd been making a particular nuisance of himself today.

But where on earth was he? Certainly not in the dambo, unless he had crouched down in the grass to hide deliberately. Could he have had the cheek to do that, or to have stayed way back in the bush beyond the dambo's edge?

Well, he couldn't have managed either without the connivance, or at least the knowledge, of some of the others. Lane glanced with sharp suspicion from one black face to another. How many of those now hastily removed smirks had actually been induced by his recent tumble, how many by the pleasing thought that Ticky was getting away with something?

'Well,' he demanded shortly, 'where's Ticky?'

'Ticky here, Bwana.' The reply came smoothly, too smoothly,

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from the last boy, Moses, who, still intent on climbing the bank, was the only member of the party whose features still wore a happily reminiscent grin.

"Ticky where?"

The loud question stopped Moses in his tracks. After a sobered glance at Lane's scowling face, he turned his head to look behind him. He made a peculiar sound in a moment, that was half grunt, half squeak. When his head turned again he did not look at Lane; his round eyes stared up, with an expression of almost idiotic surprise, at the other four boys. As they stared back some telepathic message seemed to pass through the group; after a brief silence five voices broke simultaneously into a loud, monkey-like chattering. Lane did not understand the boys' words, but he saw their free hands point, their eyes turn with one accord, to the river below them.

This, he thought angrily, was the last straw. So they were all in Ticky's little game, every damned one of them. And now it was their bright notion to pretend that he was in the river.

"Tell me where Ticky is, or I'll—"

The surveyor's voice died in his suddenly constricted throat, a sick coldness seized him in the pit of the stomach. For his threatening glare at Moses had just brought a picture back to him—a picture he had glimpsed across his own shoulder only a few minutes before. Ticky, following Moses down into the water, balancing the heavy surveying tripod on his head with both hands . . .

Fighting down his own bewildered panic, Lane silenced the boys long enough to send two of them running up to camp for help. Finding the rest too unstrung to be of any use, he began as systematic and rapid a search of the river bottom as he could

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manage alone. A dozen white men joined him presently, but two full hours had passed before a limp body was pulled from a deep washout under the bank, several yards below the crossing.

The afternoon ended in a whirlwind of activity, since any man, black or white, who died in that weather, must be buried the same day, with a coffin to be made and a grave to be dug first. The death, too, must be reported at once to the local government officer.

Such a report always involved the question of responsibility. On the face of it, the afternoon's misadventure looked bad for young Lane. How, without being guilty of gross negligence, could he possibly have let a member of his surveying crew drown so immediately behind his own back? Drowning, as a member of the investigating committee pointed out, is usually a long-drawn-out and fairly noisy process.

With all the evidence in, however, the surveyor was exonerated of blame. The state of the dead boy's lungs and a bruise on his head indicated the probability that he had stumbled into a hole on the river bottom, been stunned by a blow from the heavy tripod, and thus gone down with no outcry or struggle. Even without Lane's own fall to divert attention, there might, it appeared, have been nothing for the others to hear. Though the wits of the crew were still rather addled from shock, their testimony that there had been no commotion in the water behind them was clear enough. Every member of the searching party agreed that once an unconscious man had gone down, the entangling, clinging rushes would have kept him from ever rising to the surface again.

The government was duly advised of the occurrence of a fatal but unavoidable accident. A ghostly funeral, illuminated

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by acetylene lamps and occasional flashes of heat lightning, was held after dark in the Lamba section of the small compound cemetery.

With the completion of which last eerie formality, an unfortunate incident was officially closed.

It remained closed until about three o'clock in the morning, when Mr. Sharp, the Superintendent of the compound, was suddenly awakened by a peculiar pandemonium of sound. This emanated, he realized in a moment, from the side of the compound where the Lamba huts were massed.

When they had first begun to beat, before he slept, Mr. Sharp had been relieved to hear the Lamba drums. With one of their number just departed for Spiritland, it was the natural thing for tribesmen to spend hours rolling out on their drums the low, monotonous dirge for the dead.

Mr. Sharp had been deeply disturbed yesterday over the matter of Ticky's funeral. He knew the value placed in Africa on ceremonial procedure of all sorts; he knew that for the proper ushering out of its spirit, a body was often kept above ground until it smelled to high heaven. Realizing how seriously the Balamba might resent the summary disposal of Ticky's remains, Mr. Sharp had himself supervised the burial so that he might observe the behaviour of the mourners who huddled around the grave.

The gathering had been orderly, however, and had dispersed quietly when the ceremony, which Mr. Sharp had made as impressive as he could, was over. The subsequent beat of mourning drums had come as final evidence that the Balamba had accepted the situation philosophically, and were not minded



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to make trouble. With the mesmeric sound of lament in his ears, Mr. Sharp had gone to sleep reassured.

All his former uneasiness returned now, intensified this time by perplexity. In ten years of supervising native labour in different parts of Africa, Mr. Sharp had heard too much tribal drumming to be deceived in its emotional content, even if he did not understand its strange, wordless language. This was no funeral dirge the Balamba were sending out now—in the booming roll of their giant drums there was an unmistakable note of reiterated warning, above which the staccato beat of the smaller instruments rose in a shrill, incessant babble of terror.

But why terror and warning, even if his fellow tribesmen had, after all, resented the haste with which Ticky's body had been put away?

When the answer to his own question suddenly came to him, Mr. Sharp got up hastily and began to dress. A month had passed since the Roan labour agent had reported the rumour spread by his competitor through the Lamba villages out in the bush. In his own preoccupation with Ticky's burial, Mr. Sharp had failed to recall the incident, and so to perceive the sinister implication to be found in the boy's death . . .

European employees, walking to work some four hours later, stared curiously at the parties of natives they passed along the way. Each party held to the formation Africa on the march always used—strung out in single file, with men in front, women next, piccannins trotting along behind. Every black head was burdened with something—a clay pot, a gourd, a bulging bundle tied up in a blanket, a few resigned chickens cramped into a basket made of knotted strips of bark.

The passing of such a procession was not, in itself, remark-

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able. New workers always walked in from bush villages followed by their wives and children, carrying their worldly goods done up in knobby bundles on their heads. It was an integral part of the mining camp scene—that frieze of black figures, glimpsed against a background of mud house or tin shack or steel scaffolding, of bush or anthill or open grassy dambo. Its characteristic gait was a slow, rhythmic amble; its members kept up an incessant exchange of comment and remark; but as no burdened head was ever turned from straight front, individual speakers were hard to identify. Each line simply seemed to float an invisible tail behind it—an audible tail of sing-song voice, of rich, lazy laughter.

But the lines this morning were not coming into camp, nor were they ambling, or talking, or laughing. They were headed out into the bush, and they were moving rapidly and quite silently.

The Lamba drums had fallen silent, too, with Mr. Sharp's appearance before daylight in the compound. But not before every member of the tribe within earshot had been told how the Snake had risen from the Luanshya River yesterday afternoon, and had laughed. Nor had the drums failed to remind the Balamba that the Snake was likely at any time to rise and laugh again.

The Balamba living in the compound did not propose to be present when that happened. Some of the bolder members of the tribe were waiting to work out a ticket, or to collect wages due them at the time office. A great many were already on their way home.

Mr. Sharp telephoned the Manager as soon as he judged the latter had reached his office. His report was not optimistic. The

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departing Balamba, in Mr. Sharp's view, were not likely ever to come back, nor was this the worst feature of the situation. Members of other tribes in the compound were bound to be affected too; the superstitious fear bred by a happening of this sort always spread like a creeping contagion. Mr. Sharp had seen more than one piece of African ground distinguished by nothing except the fact that no African foot dared tread on it. How long would it take the Roan property to fall into this category?

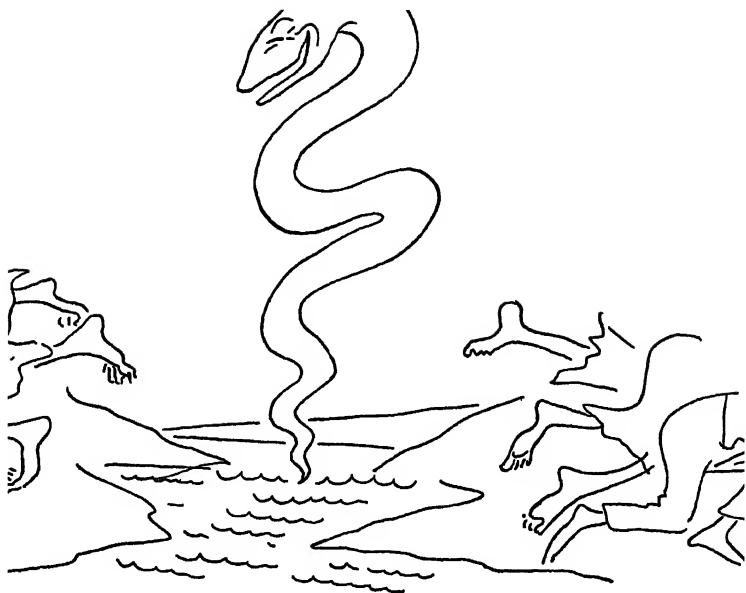
'Oh yes, sir,' he said, at the close of his long talk with the Manager, 'you may be sure I'll go on doing my best to stop any more of them from leaving. But I'm afraid it's not much use; as I say, natives simply won't listen to a white man about a thing of this sort.'

As he replaced the receiver echoes of his early morning attempts to make a series of Lamba boys listen rang through his mind—fragments of the arguments he had used over and over, knowing them to be futile even as he used them. For they were a white man's arguments, based on his conception of logic—and when had a white man's logic ever touched a black man's belief?

' . . . so you see there's no reason to think Ticky saw anything in the river. He was drowned, and that's all there is to it.'

'How could he have drowned so quickly, Bwana, without a sound?'

'I've just told you how the tripod struck his head. It knocked him senseless, so that he fell, and then the rushes pulled him down. The rushes are very thick in the river, and very strong, and the current is running fast.'



'I do not know about what you say, Bwana. It may be so . . . but I have never seen a man drown like that.'

'You talk of what you have seen. Have you seen many snakes?'

'Ya, Bwana. Many.'

'Then you must know that a snake crawls on its belly. It cannot stand up on its tail. And it cannot laugh.'

'This Snake can stand on its tail, Bwana. Did it not stand so yesterday? And if it had not laughed, why should Ticky be dead?'

'I'm trying to make you understand that Ticky is dead because he was drowned. Listen to me. If the Snake stood up like that and laughed, how is it that all the others did not see and hear it too?'

'Because the Snake only wished to kill Ticky, Bwana. That is plain.'

'But why? Ticky was a good boy. What had he done that the Snake should wish to kill him?'

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'Who knows, Bwana? Perhaps it was because he did not believe that the Snake was in the Luanshya. Many of us did not believe—yesterday.'

'But—how could a snake kill a man like that, without even touching him? Why should Ticky die just because it stood up and laughed?'

Bare feet had shuffled on the ground at this point, eyes had shifted uneasily, sometimes fingers had clutched at a small wooden or bone charm. If an answer came at all, it came in a whisper. Mr. Sharp had no need to hear it, since he knew so well what it was.

'Because the Snake is an *imfwiti*, Bwana. An evil one with magic power.'

In conscientious pursuit of his duty, Mr. Sharp had even asked the question he knew to be most futile of all.

'Do you not know there are no *imfwiti*? Have not the Bwanas at the mission told you so many times?'

To which no answer needed to be spoken either, because it was written so plainly on each sullen or frightened black face.

'Are not white men forever telling us there are no *imfwiti*? Are not their words forever being given the lie by such a thing as happened yesterday? Ticky is dead—and you want me to believe there are no *imfwiti* . . . !'

And so the discussion was back at its starting point, the point from which such a discussion could never get away.

When the Manager had hung his own receiver up he sat for a long time without moving. Under his hand on the desk lay a cable from London, dealing urgently with the familiar necessity for putting the mine into production at the earliest possible moment. Beside it lay local memoranda, itemizing the various

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gangs on the property on which more boys were needed. If Mr. Sharp were right in his size-up of the situation there would soon be no gangs, and the mine would never reach the production stage at all. Even a serious delay in the present work could easily prove disastrous to an organization struggling to its feet under the handicap of a general financial depression.

At the end of an hour the Manager's frowning gaze focussed on the map showing the present development of the orebody, which hung on the office wall. Through an adjacent window, sunlight glinted from the steel framework of the building in which rock taken from the orebody should, in another eighteen months or so, be ground daily to powder. A tough battle with technical and local difficulties had preceded the drawing of every line on that map, the pushing of every steel skeleton on the property above the surprised tops of the bush trees.

Too damned tough, thought the Manager, his harassed frown deepening to a scowl, to let a cockeyed snake make hash of the whole thing now.

Something had to be done about that Snake—but what under heaven was there to do? What *could* you do about a thing that didn't even exist—except in the minds of a lot of black boys? Mr. Sharp had suggested sending out into the bush and asking a Lamba chief to come in and talk to his people—one of the older, more influential, and presumably more poised, native rulers. A number of young tribal chieftains were employed on the mine, but the two royal Balamba who had been on the payroll yesterday had exhibited a marked lack of poise by being among the missing this morning.

Considering Mr. Sharp's suggestion again, the Manager dismissed it finally as too slow a procedure. No chief could be

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haled in by force, and the compound could easily empty itself while some aged potentate sat on a log in a bush village and deliberated with his headmen and his gods the question of whether or not he should come. And his answer, in the end, would probably be no.

Mr. Sharp's idea, of course, was based on his conviction that no white man could make the Balamba listen to him. No *white man* . . .

The Manager suddenly sat up straight in his chair. After a few minutes of thought, he rang the bell, and presently began to dictate a telegram.

'Chirupula Stephenson!' he exclaimed, when his office door opened early the next morning to admit an elderly man of medium height and compact build. 'I couldn't be gladder to see my own grandmother. But how on earth did you manage to make it so soon?'

'Simply enough,' was the smiling reply, given over a cordial handshake. 'I happened to be in the Kapiri post office when your wire came through. It sounded urgent, so I turned my lorry straight north instead of going back to the farm. A bit of night driving, of course, but I always rather enjoy that, as long as I've a boy along to spell me at the wheel.'

The newcomer's neat grey hair and imperial, his fresh pink skin, his well-kept hands, and his high and carefully polished boots were all more suggestive of the English country squire than the Rhodesian pioneer. He wore the usual Rhodesian khaki, but with an air that somehow managed to confer upon that humble material the rank of tweed. His trousers were creased, his freshly laundered shirt was finished off at the throat

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with a neat bow tie. Only his eyes, with their humorous, kindly, but detached and rather dreamy gaze, marked him as a man who has spent most of his adult life outside the centres of civilization.

It was thirty years since John Stephenson had come out from England as a boy in his teens. After a restless period in South Africa, he had accepted from Cecil Rhodes a post as government administrator in Northern Rhodesia. He had stayed on there as hunter and trader; and had finally bought land near Kapiri M'poshi, where he had settled down to raising citrus fruit by means of an ingenious scheme of irrigation worked out by himself.

Outside a quite usual sequence of occupation, John Stephenson's pioneer life in Northern Rhodesia had followed its own pattern. During long stretches of his early years he had seen no other member of his own race. Wasting no futile regret on this, he had looked, with an extraordinary lack of arrogance and a broad human sympathy, at the only people he did see. He had learned to speak a number of their languages with ease and fluency, he had learned to follow a mental process that few Europeans find intelligible. No doubt his wife, the daughter of a chief of the Lala tribe, had helped him to his understanding—by the time the copperfields were opened she had been his wife for more than twenty years.

In the members of his wife's race, meanwhile, he had inspired a unique and complex mixture of emotion. That the same labourers worked his farm year after year was a sure sign of genuine liking in a people to whom money means little. Respect was advertised in the native name by which he had come to be universally known; 'Chirupula,' to the Lala tribe,



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indicates a man who never strikes unjustly, but whose blows, when they come, are accurate and hard.

The final element in the native attitude toward Chirupula Stephenson was quite a different sort of thing. Rooted in an idea that was old long before Northern Rhodesia had been given a white man's name, it had sprung into actual being as a result of pure coincidence.

In Lala tradition, Lesa, the Almighty, had furnished the materials; but three brothers, Kashindika, Luchere and Shingo, had actually fashioned the world. So that when, at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, a Lala witchdoctor announced that the brothers were coming from their home in the west to inspect the results of their handiwork it was a frightening, as well as a tremendous, prophecy. What, the great question was, were the brothers going to look like? The possibility of being caught off guard by such important personages—who were, of course, tribal gods—was almost too appalling to contemplate.

The witchdoctor, consulted, said that the two older creators would be men with white skin. Kashindika would have brown hair on his head and on his face; Luchere's similar adornments would be red. Shingo, the youngest, would appear as the lion into which it was well known that he had turned himself a long time ago, when the whole world was still very young.

Though the chance of failing to recognize the party was thus eliminated, the party itself at once assumed an even more formidable aspect. For who in the Lala country had ever seen a man with a white skin? Hair on the face occurred occasionally, it was true. But red hair—*ai-e-e-e!*

Then one morning young Stephenson walked into Lalaland, across its western border. His hair and imperial shone in those

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days like copper under the bright Rhodesian sun. He was accompanied by another, brown-bearded, Englishman, and a pet baboon.

It was, of course, disconcerting to see a baboon where a lion had been expected, though the gratified witchdoctor hastened to point out that there was really no reason why a god capable of becoming a lion could not also become a baboon, if the rôle happened to strike his fancy. Had not the fancies of gods often shown themselves to be unaccountable and strange?

The brown-bearded man and the discrepant monkey had vanished, in time, from Lalaland; other white men, who were only too plainly not gods, had come in. Lalaland, its inhabitants had come to understand, was now part of a white man's country that was called, for some reason, Northern Rhodesia.

And thirty years later, every native of Northern Rhodesia still accorded to Chirupula Stephenson the humble salutation he usually reserved for the chief of his own tribe. It was still a little hard to be quite sure about that long ago Lala prophecy. A baboon was certainly not a lion, and witchdoctors, of course, had been known to make mistakes. But on the other hand, a god was a god—more important, even, than a spirit—and Luchere was one of the greatest of all the gods. In the lore of a number of tribes he differed only in name. It had never, anywhere in Africa, been a good thing to take chances with gods . . .

Over a cup of tea, Chirupula gave close attention to the Manager's account of the accident in the river, and the crisis with which it had faced the Roan. At its conclusion he sat for a few minutes in thoughtful silence, and then leaned forward.

'Well, sir,' he said, 'you've been a good friend to me since

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you took over here, and I'd like to see you carry your plans for the mine through. Besides,' he added, smiling slightly, 'one must look out for one's own interests, you know, and I should



hate to lose such a good market for my oranges. It's possible that I may be able to help you with this thing—certainly I shall be very glad to try.'

'Good man!' exclaimed the Manager. 'I was sure I could count on you.'

'I don't promise that my help will be effective, mind you,'

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interposed Chirupula, raising his hand. 'As long as I've known these people, I sometimes feel that I might as well have come out from England yesterday. The one thing about which I'm really convinced is that no European really knows the African—beyond the point where the African wants to be known. However, as I said, I'll be glad to do what I can.'

'I suppose it's a bit early to ask if you've formed any idea of what might be done?'

'Well,' said Chirupula, 'as a matter of fact, I have, but I'd rather not go into it until I'm a bit more sure of my ground. Suppose I take myself over to the compound now and talk with Mr. Sharp and some of my native friends. I'll come back here and report to you as soon as possible.'

'I don't know how well you're going to like my suggestion,' he began, as he seated himself several hours later in the Manager's office. 'I may as well say at once that it won't go down well with either the missions or the government. They'll feel it's encouraging the natives in their superstition. And so, in a way, it is. But Mr. Sharp is quite right about the uselessness of trying to argue with the Balamba about their Snake; the legend is as old as the tribe itself, and the peculiar circumstances of the accident fit it altogether too neatly. This leaves you, I think, with only one possible line of procedure.'

'Which is?'

'Agree with the Balamba that the Snake is in the river—as long as they think it is, it might just as well be. And get it out.'

'Get it out! How?'

'Let the Balamba themselves get it out—by their own methods. They know how well enough.'

'Oh, you mean by some sort of witchdoctor's hocus-pocus?'

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'That's one way of putting it,' said Chirupula with a slight smile. 'The missions, of course, could think of a much worse name. The Balamba would call it a religious ceremony, over which a chief, rather than a witchdoctor, would preside. However, the religion involved would certainly not be the sort taught at the missions.' Chirupula paused to glance inquiringly at the Manager. 'Shall I go on?' he asked.

'By all means, go on.'

'Well, to begin with,' said Chirupula, settling back in his chair, 'I went out this morning to see my old friend Katanga. His village is only a few miles from the mine, and he is, as you probably know, one of the paramount chiefs of the Balamba. I found him very much upset over this business, as he likes his people to work here at the Roan, where he can come to visit them conveniently. He said at once that the Snake must be exorcised from the Luanshya, and went on to volunteer his own services in connection with the necessary rite, which would take the form of a prayer and sacrifice to Lesa, the Almighty.'

'As this sort of thing is strictly a royal affair, we agreed that as many tribal rulers as possible should be invited to participate. You've some twenty young fellows on your payroll who qualify, as chiefs, or chiefs' sons. With Mr. Sharp's help I managed to see them all on my return from Katanga's, and they all jumped at the idea of taking part in the ceremony. They don't, you see, get many chances these days to exercise their wufumu—the ancient power that combines chieftainship with priesthood. They're not Balamba, of course, but that very fact will be useful to you, as each one will take jolly good care to let his whole tribe know how he helped rid the mine of such a fearful curse as the Lamba Snake. Katanga, of course, will see that

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word goes out through his own territory—the Lamba drums ought to have a different story to tell the next time they beat.

‘Call the business what you like,’ concluded Chirupula, ‘I’m convinced it’s the only practical solution to your problem.’

The Manager thought rapidly. He recognized the logic of fighting fire with fire; but he knew that Chirupula was right in saying that the missions would strongly disapprove of the natives’ being allowed to hold a ceremony that was directly opposed in character to mission teaching. Mission work in the colony enjoyed the moral support of the government, and the latter’s good will was vital to the mining company. His Majesty’s local representatives, if consulted, could certainly not officially approve of the suggestion. But they could, unofficially, overlook an accomplished fact, if they understood its necessity. The Manager rather thought that in this, which was certainly a case of necessity, they would understand.

‘We’ll do it,’ he said. ‘That is, if you’ll be good enough to handle it for us. Personally, I have no idea how to go about such a thing. Mr. Sharp, of course, will be glad to help in any way he can.’

‘Well,’ said Chirupula, smiling, ‘I was so sure you’d want it done, that a good many of the preliminaries are already arranged. I took the responsibility of bringing old Katanga back with me, along with two members of the Dog totem, who must always take part in any sacrifice to Lesa. Their alacrity in coming, by the way, shows you how seriously they all take this business. No one would have budged, ordinarily, in less than a week. We’ve a few small properties to collect, and then we can go right ahead with the ceremony. This afternoon—if the young chiefs can cut a shift of work.’

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‘That’s easily arranged,’ said the Manager, ‘but how about your properties—can’t we get them together for you?’

‘No, I’ll do that. The fewer people who have a finger in this the better. I’ve been asked to attend the ceremony, but no other European, and no native who isn’t an actual participant, must come prying around. You’ll understand that the rite would be quite ineffectual if it were desecrated by an alien presence.’

There was nothing, Chirupula reported to the Manager later, to indicate its royal or ceremonial character in the outward appearance of the company that set out from the compound in his lorry that afternoon. The old chief, Katanga, was wrapped simply in a long strip of calico; each of the Dog totem men wore a loincloth made of antelope hide. The young chiefs were all dressed in the motley collection of European garments characteristic of Africans who live in a European community.

At the Luanshya River the lorry left the road and bumped slowly along the dambo, until it reached the spot where Lane’s surveying party had crossed two days before. Here it halted. The young chiefs lifted Katanga down and carried him carefully to a grass mat spread near the river bank. This was not, Chirupula explained, so much in deference to his age or rank as to the fact that on no ceremonial occasion must the feet of Lamba royalty come in contact with the earth. Chirupula seated himself beside Katanga, while the two men of the Dog totem selected a spot suitable for the erection of an altar.

When the site chosen had been cleared of grass, the young chiefs were observed to pause and consult together. One of them presently approached Katanga’s mat.

He and his colleagues, he said, had been thinking about the

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temporary altar proposed for use this afternoon, and wondering if it would really be adequate. What if He Whose Name Is Not Spoken were affronted by such informality? What if the Lamba ancestors were displeased and refused to do their part? Would it not be better to postpone the ceremony for a day or two, until a permanent altar could be erected in stone?

Something in the spokesman's manner led Chirupula to suspect that the hope of avoiding a few more working shifts mingled with concern for form in the minds of Africa's younger generation of royalty. He made haste to put in a word, before Katanga, who was knitting his brows over the unexpected problem, could frame a reply.

The suggestion, said Chirupula, was an excellent one. So excellent was it, in fact, that only one objection to it could possibly be raised. This lay in the presence of the Snake itself in the river. What if it were to rise again, and laugh, before a permanent altar could be built?

'You are brave men to be here now,' he concluded gravely, 'risking your own lives to save those of others. The Snake, of course, may rise even as you stand talking to me.'

With a startled and hastily averted glance at the river, the young man hurried back to his companions, who lost no further time in commencing work on a temporary altar.

This took the form of a conical hut, or spirit house. Stakes driven into the ground in a circle were drawn together at the top and bound with bark string. The peaked skeleton thus formed was then covered neatly with grass thatch. As every spirit house must be open to each point of the compass, two doors were left, one in the east, the other in the west. Lesa, explained Chirupula, in answer to the Manager's puzzled look,



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obviously recognizes only two directions, when He sends His sun out by one and recalls it by the other. To a great many of His children in Africa, therefore, it seems unnecessary to trouble with more.

When the thatching job was complete, Katanga rose to his feet with a strip of clean white calico in his hand. This, tied to the top of the spirit house, would direct the eyes of the Lamba royal ancestors in Spiritland to the proper spot on earth. Not, Katanga paused to explain, that a Lamba royal ancestor was stupid, or in need of prompting. Still, where vital issues are at stake, it is always best to leave nothing to chance. Grave nods from his young associates having acknowledged the wisdom of this reasoning, the old chief, satisfied, stepped to a second mat to fasten the cloth securely in place.

While Katanga's fingers fumbled with the knot, one of the Dog totem men took his stand at the east opening of the spirit house; the other stationed himself at the west. After a little scuffling for key positions, the young chiefs ranged themselves in a wide semi-circle behind Katanga.

But with the fluttering out of the small white signal a complete silence fell; a silence and a decorum of manner becoming to mortals on whom the eyes of the Great Ones in Spiritland are about to rest. For Katanga was ready to open the ceremony by invoking the aid of the chiefs who had ruled the Lamba tribe before him.

As if guided by the instinct that prompts an actor to rivet attention on himself before he speaks, Katanga stepped back a pace and then stood, erect and motionless, facing the spirit house. As one minute passed, and then another, Chirupula, watching from his slightly withdrawn position, became con-

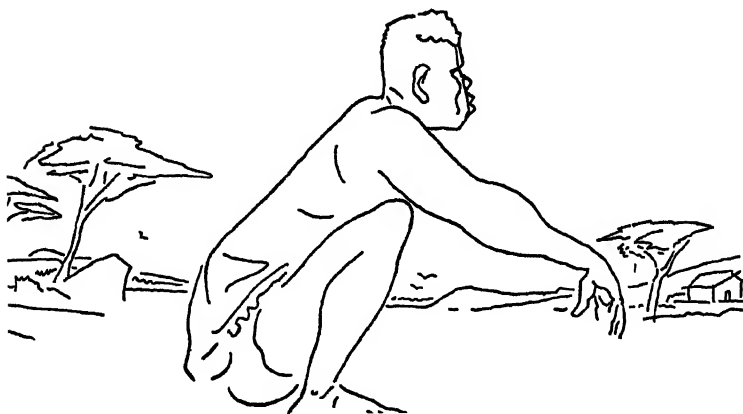
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scious of something he had often observed before in attending a native ceremony.

'Thirty years in the country haven't enlightened me as to just how they do it,' he said. 'But when Katanga raised his hands at last and began to speak, the impression that he had caught the attention he wanted was inescapable. I was as convinced as any black boy there that Nkana and all the rest of them in Spiritland were looking and listening. I rather think you would have been too. A bit of an uncanny feeling, sometimes . . .'

Clouds were massed heavily again, low around the horizon—a touch, Chirupula thought, that might have been supplied by someone with an eye for dramatic effect. It turned the open dambo into a natural amphitheatre—a perfect setting for an invocation from a ruling monarch to a line of dead African kings.

Katanga's voice rose in a high-pitched, rhythmic chant, since the speech of ordinary human intercourse would have been recognized by even the youngest chief present as quite out of place. As if it possessed a strong life of its own, the tempo of



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his phrasing laid hold of Katanga's body and swayed it forward and back, without the apparent co-operation of muscle or brain. In a moment the movement had passed like a current through the whole group, riveting it together, turning its members curiously into a single, indivisible unit. A vibrant humming, issuing through the closed lips of his rapt assistants, seemed to pick up Katanga's words and lift them bodily into the hot, still air.

'Great Kawunda, great Chembo, great Makisa, great Nkana . . . You who are in Spiritland, near Him Whose Name Is Not Spoken, hear us, your children, who still grope in the darkness of the world. With us stands Chirupula, our friend and wise councillor. With us stand many young chiefs from faraway lands. Lands so far away that I have never seen them—though you, knowing all things, are doubtless aware of their existence.

'Here is a mine, Great Ones, on the banks of a river. A mine where white men dig for metal in the ground. Many of your children have worked, and lived here, and been happy, finding the place a pleasant one, finding the white men kind masters. (It would be better, perhaps, if the white men were not in a hurry. But all white men are in a hurry, and it is not because of this that we disturb you today.)

'We call to you, Great Ones, because we are in trouble, because fear eats like a little cold worm in our hearts. No longer can we live by the Luanshya River in peace, no longer can we work in safety on the white man's mine. For the Snake, the terrible *imfwiti*, has come into the Luanshya waters. Already the evil one has risen and laughed, and one of your children is dead.

'Intercede with Him Whose Name Is Not Spoken, oh, Great Ones. Intercede for us who dare not, alone, make approach to

## Chapter Seven

His throne. Beg Him to drive the Snake out of the Luanshya. Beg Him to drive the Snake from the river, that the white man's mine may prosper, that your children may still dance by the fires in the compound.

'Great Kawunda, great Chembo, great Makisa, great Nkana . . . Fathers of the Lamba people, answer our prayer!'

The swaying bodies came to rest as one body with the lowering of Katanga's hands. When the ensuing reverent silence had prolonged itself sufficiently, one of the Dog totem men sprinkled white meal, from the palms of his cupped hands, over the ground at the east door of the spirit house. The other repeated the gesture, indicating concern for the material welfare of departed Lamba royalty, at the west.

After a short pause, Katanga surprised Chirupula with a slight departure from the routine previously planned for the ceremony.

'We, of course, are Balamba,' he said, turning to the young chiefs, 'and it is naturally to Lamba spirits that we pray. But this matter, after all, concerns you as well as ourselves, since your people, also, live on the banks of the Luanshya. It seems to me that it would be well for you, too, to make offering and supplication to our departed Great Ones.'

The young chiefs glanced at each other doubtfully. That the prospect of taking more than a chorus part in the ceremony was tempting, could be read plainly in every face. But could a man actually pray to alien ancestors without seriously offending his own? Chirupula was trying to think of a tactful way to end the anxious debate that followed, when it occurred to the young Angoni chieftain that as long as no rites had been performed to attract the notice of the other ancestors in Spiritland, it was unlikely that they were either looking or listening.

### *Laugh of a Snake*

This happy thought settled the matter, and each young chief stepped forward in turn, to sprinkle meal and offer a prayer to the Lamba spirits.

‘That was a great score for Katanga,’ interpolated Chirupula, ‘though the rest were too young and naïve to realize it. Nothing is more edifying to a proper chief than the sight of alien rulers saluting his own forbears. Twenty of them at once, of course, was magnificent.’

At the conclusion of the last chief’s speech, Chirupula brought a string of ivory beads from his pocket, where they had been placed for safekeeping. The Dog totem men broke the string, and knelt to scatter the beads over the floor of the spirit house.

The tusks of elephant might in modern times have become the property of the Great White King across the water, but each one of the black rulers now being supplicated had once proudly claimed as his own every piece of ivory found in his land. Each would see in these beads the familiar symbol of an old power, would recognize in their scattering the ultimate gesture of tribute from his people.

With the offering of ivory, the royal ancestors might be safely considered propitiated. They, it was to be hoped, would now establish direct contact with the great Lesa Himself.

Only blood would propitiate Lesa; but with the coming of effete days on Africa, human blood might no longer be shed in His honour. A fowl, whose pure white feathers symbolized the youth and innocence of the child for whom it substituted, was brought from the lorry. The Dog totem men put an end to its frenzied squawking by chopping off its head. They then tossed it hastily into the spirit house.

## Chapter Seven

Even Chirupula was conscious of an excited shortening of breath. For beside furnishing sacrificial blood, the decapitated fowl was to demonstrate the success or failure of the afternoon's rite. If Lesa accepted the sacrifice, He would, during the next few minutes, drive the Snake from the Luanshya River. In token of this benevolent action, He would allow the body of the fowl to jerk to its final rest inside His shrine. If the sacrifice were rejected, Lesa would cause the spasmodically twitching body to emerge through one of the spirit house openings, and lie on the ground outside.

An inquisitive peering at or listening to what Lesa was doing would be an unthinkable piece of insolence; it would, moreover, be extremely unwise to risk a glimpse of the Snake, if it did indeed pass from the Luanshya. With the tossing in of the fowl, therefore, each native placed his hands over his eyes, and joined in the utterance of a loud, banshee-like wail.

The hair-raising sound died away at length, but there was a long pause after that before anyone moved. Katanga, as master of ceremonies, was the first to lower his hands. As if pulled against his will, his glance moved, slowly and fearfully, to the ground at his feet.

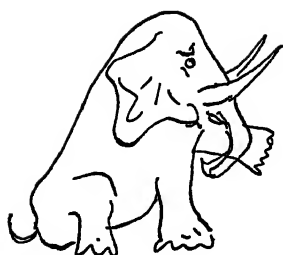
. . . . .

I sighed again as I typed the last paragraph of the October report.

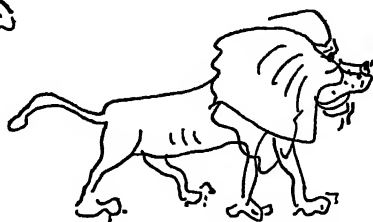
'The trouble with the Lamba tribe previously mentioned reached a rather disturbing climax last month. We were, however, fortunate in finding an effective means of dealing with it. I am glad to report that boys are coming in now at a satisfactory rate, and that as far as the native labour force is concerned, all work on the property should go forward as scheduled.'

### *Laugh of a Snake*

Oh well . . . it really wasn't practical to tell a board of directors in London that their five million pound investment had almost been lost because a snake had stood on the end of its tail and laughed. Not even when a gratifying account could be added of how, through the agency of a tribal god dressed in polished riding boots and immaculate khaki, a white chicken's body had saved the situation, by flopping to rest inside a house built of sticks.



## Starting with a Circus



WHEN WE SHOW our collection of carved animals, and explain that they were all done from life by entirely untutored natives of the Northern Rhodesian bush, anyone present who is well up on natural history pounces immediately on one of the items.

‘And just how,’ comes the inevitable question, ‘did a Northern Rhodesian native ever see a kangaroo?’

The explanation of the kangaroo’s presence in a collection of African animals is usually considered rather more remarkable than the fact.

The natives of Northern Rhodesia saw the Australian marsupial through the offices of a woman—a woman whose claims to distinction were two. She possessed a vocabulary that would have made its mark in a sailors’ lodging house, and she possessed an originality of mind that prompted her every year to penetrate a region famous for its big game with a circus advertising the world’s largest troupe of wild animals.

Among these there was always a kangaroo. It always put on a boxing act with one of the human performers in the circus, a circumstance which explains the fact that a wooden or bone

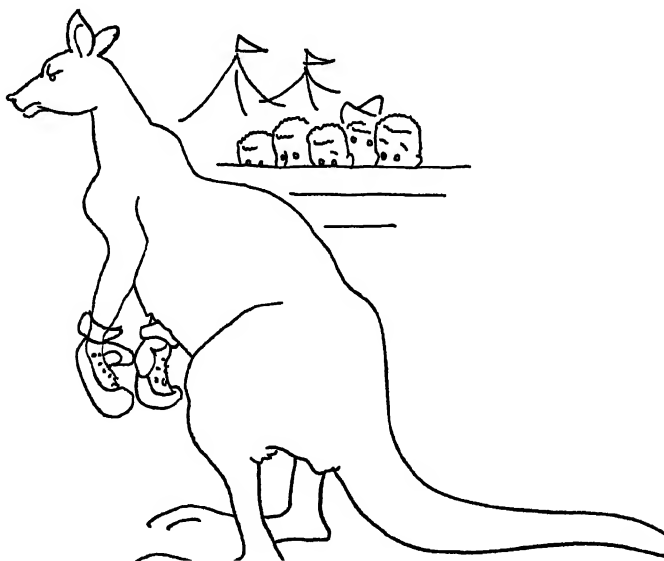


## Starting with a Circus

kangaroo carved in Northern Rhodesia often has disproportionately large forepaws. Perhaps some of the natives, all of whom were fascinated to the point of hypnotism by the boxing animal, were too bemused to perceive that its gloves were something donned for the occasion; or perhaps they simply felt that as a kangaroo's mission in life was obviously to box, it was properly depicted in its boxing equipment.

When the circus came to the Roan the first year, not long after we ourselves had arrived, I attended it in a spirit of simple incredulity. But as the animals, that were plainly neither stuffed nor mythical, began to appear, an idea gradually dawned in my mind. I had been writing home for several weeks, without the glimpse of anything more startling than a few antelope and monkeys to report, and now perceived an opportunity to remedy a situation that was fast becoming humiliating.

Taking my camera in hand the following afternoon, I set forth in search of concrete evidence that I was actually residing,



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in a state of constant peril, in the middle of a big game country.

Luck was with me. At the circus grounds I caught a circus hand in the act of chaperoning an elephant down to the river for a drink. That the animal was exceedingly tame was evidenced by the complete absence of shackles from any of its limbs, an absence that made it exactly the sort of pictorial material I required. The obliging circus hand stood well out of range while I photographed his charge industriously, from all angles.

The resulting prints, enclosed in a number of letters, had a sensational success. A humane aunt wrote to say she hoped I had spared the elephant's life after taking its picture. A blood-thirsty young cousin wrote to hope even more earnestly that I had not. A gratifying number of correspondents wondered at my intrepidity in photographing a pachyderm from such extremely close range. And then a friend who knew his natural history—there are always an uncomfortable lot of these well-informed minds around—wrote:

'It's a swell picture—but what was an Indian elephant doing in Africa? It must have had a pretty long walk.'

That it was possible to stay even one week in the Northern Rhodesian bush without seeing a great deal of game will probably seem odd to anyone who has been there on a hunting expedition. But the very act of going on a hunting expedition creates a situation very different from the one that existed in the copperfields. No matter how inexperienced or new to the country a hunter may be, his own entire time and energy are devoted to his purpose in being where he is. He is armed to the teeth, and is accompanied by expert native trackers, beaters,

### *Starting with a Circus*

guides, and gun-bearers, and by at least one European safari manager, all of whom unite in an earnest effort to confront him, from downwind, with game in large quantities.

Game in the copperfields was simply an incidental part of the whole background furnished by the bush—a fact which in itself lent an extra touch of drama to its every appearance. Particularly, of course, to the appearance of certain forms of animal life. Antelope were beautiful, and monkeys entertaining, but they could not furnish anyone with the pleasing sensation of living dangerously.

We occasionally lived even more dangerously than was strictly necessary.

While we were still in the temporary camp, a Mrs. Grayson returned late one evening from a shopping trip to Ndola to find her husband dispensing cocktails to a party of friends who had driven over unexpectedly from Nchanga. In a hurried conference with her spouse she was appalled to learn that he, with the usual masculine disregard of domestic detail, had asked them to stay for dinner.

Cutting short her wail of dismay and maintaining his lordly rôle, Mr. Grayson said that Candle, the cook, had declared himself quite capable of preparing a nice and ample dinner. Mrs. Grayson, said Mr. Grayson, had put in a lot of time training Candle. Would she now come out, relax with a cocktail, and let Candle, for once, show what he could do?

Mrs. Grayson wondered hysterically if, among other things, Candle were going to say: 'Let there be a roast large enough to feed this party.' Realizing, however, that she herself could do little in the miracle line at this hour, and feeling too tired

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to try, she resigned herself to the worst and followed her husband's advice.

A little later in the diningroom she noted that Candle had not forgotten his dinner party formula. But fish hors d'œuvre and canned asparagus would scarcely compensate for the fact that the only meat in the house was two or three small mutton chops. Mrs. Grayson closed her eyes when the entrée plates had been cleared to make way for the main course.

Hearing admiring murmurs in a moment, she opened them to see the house boy setting a platter containing two fine fat chickens before her husband. They proved to be as excellent in taste as in appearance, and everyone spoke enthusiastically of Mrs. Grayson's ability as a housekeeper. As she tried to look suitably modest, Mrs. Grayson herself wondered vainly where on earth the chickens could possibly have come from.

In the morning she learned that they had come from the Warriner chicken house next door. Oh, no—Candle hadn't asked Mrs. Warriner if he might take them—Mrs. Warriner might not have wanted to let them go—and then what would Mama and her friends have done for a roast? Candle had known a great deal better than to ask for the chickens.

Mrs. Warriner was an English newcomer, rather formidable in aspect, with whom the American Mrs. Grayson as yet had only a bowing acquaintance; and it was with embarrassment and trepidation that she went across after breakfast to explain, apologize, and make proper restitution for the purloined fowls. She hoped without much hope that a lady fresh from the British Isles and a pattern of behaviour set by servants there, would find it possible to believe that any domestic would

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actually go, uninstructed, into a neighbourhood chicken house for the purpose of abstracting chickens.

With Mrs. Warriner's appearance, however, Mrs. Grayson's mind dropped its fumblings with her forthcoming speech to wonder what was wrong with her neighbour. This was not the cool Mrs. Warriner she had met before, this flushed, excited being who did not enter the livingroom so much as carom precariously through its open door. Mrs. Grayson's suspense was brief, for her transformed hostess burst instantly into torrential speech.

From this Mrs. Grayson learned that a leopard had visited the Warriner chicken house on the previous evening and had made off with its two occupants. Though short, the episode had been pregnant with drama; Mrs. Warriner, she assured her caller, had scarcely slept a wink all night for thinking of it. A caller's ears, this morning, had obviously saved her from something like an apoplectic stroke.

'You didn't see the leopard, did you?' asked Mrs. Grayson faintly, as soon as she could get in a word.

'Oh, no—the commotion was fearful, but before we could find the electric torch and get Mr. Warriner's rifle out, it was all over. We'd not unpacked the rifle, you see—we'd never *dreamed* we'd have to use it so soon—and right on our own premises—just fancy! But the creature must have been a leopard—two chickens, you see—Mr. Warriner's quite sure no smaller animal could possibly have made off with two at once. I can't quite see how a leopard did, but there it is—it managed somehow. It was really most frightfully exciting, my dear—you've no idea. I must write home at once and tell them all about it . . . You agree, don't you—that it must have been a leopard?'

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Looking into her neighbour's shining round eyes, which were now clouded momentarily by a small flicker of doubt, Mrs. Grayson rapidly weighed the value of two chickens and truth against the zest of back yard adventure. The scales tipped heavily to one side.

'Oh, I'm sure it was a leopard,' she said firmly. 'As a matter of fact, I'd meant to ask if you'd heard anything last night. We thought there was something prowling about our house too—but of course we had no chickens for it to take.'

A leopard did prowl around a house occasionally, as Mrs. Grayson well knew—it had not been two months since one had torn through the screen door of a front porch one evening down in one of the little settlements on the railway line, and had snatched a pet dog from under the horrified eyes of its owners who were seated quietly in an adjoining room. A leopard could be very bold on occasion—quite as bold as a cook boy with an unexpected dinner party on his hands.

Nor, by any means, were all our copperfield adventures synthetic ones. The more spectacular animals were there, and as time went on personal encounter with them was inevitable. Encounter ranging in quality from the amazingly tranquil to the occasionally violent and even tragic.

About our leopard on the Ndola road there was no least suggestion of violence—and my initial introduction to the greatest cat of all was completely lacking in any element of drama.

Driving to the Patamoto Gorge early one Sunday morning, Douglas and I came on a lioness and two cubs lying not more than ten yards from the side of the road. The scene as we first glimpsed it was intensely domestic—mother washing one baby's

### *Starting with a Circus*

ear while the other made a general nuisance of itself by playing with mother's tail. Even their departure on our appearance did not suggest a savage female protecting her savage young as much as it did an anxious, fussy matron hustling two troublesome charges to an overdue appointment.

My greatest personal thrill inspired by a lion was somewhat delayed. Douglas and I were then on a holiday motor trip, and had lost the Great North Road at one of the points where it became rather uncertain of its own intentions. After wandering a bit in gathering darkness, we decided to sleep in the car and renew the search for the road in the light of the next day. We slept soundly, while a lion laid several circles of spoor around the car, and even planted one dusty paw on the running board.

Three lions kept the European attendant and several of his native boys in the pump house out on the Kafubu River for several hours one morning, as they themselves played together in the sun just outside the door.

They looked well fed, which did not point to their being at all dangerous, and the pumpman concluded that they must have been living close at hand long enough to have grown used to the sound of the pumps and the presence of human beings, for when he shouted out of the window in an attempt to scare them off, they evidently did not regard his voice as at all disturbing. Putting their amiability to the concrete proof by stepping out among them, however, was another matter, and the pumpman prudently remained where he was until they had finished their gambols and retired. The boys, entirely unimpressed by the playful character of the leonine visitation, resigned from work at the pump station in a body.

The mood of the two lions that treed the native gang at one

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of the outlying shafts will never be accurately known. Almost all Rhodesian natives regard all lions as formidable, and when the gang, emerging from the shaft at eleven o'clock at night, saw these, it took at once to trees and stayed there. The lions were gone when next morning's shift came on at seven o'clock, but there was plenty of spoor to prove that they had been no figment of the boys' collective imagination; and the treed gang united in swearing that the animals had only departed when the approach of the new shift was heard in the distance.

The lion, of course, has probably been de-bunked more thoroughly than anything else in Africa, and it is somewhat disillusioning to see the king of the jungle reduced to the status of 'vermin' on a Rhodesian hunting licence. In spite of its blasted reputation, however, and no matter how many pleasant members of the species he may see, the average European resident of Rhodesia will probably always share something of the natives' feeling toward the lion. And when one deliberately seeks human society, the thought that its motives may not be kindly is inescapable.

Our Great Dane was a uniform light fawn colour, and after he reached his enormous maturity we found it unwise to let him roam abroad after dark, and thus expose him to pot shots taken on the theory that he was actually the creature which, in the uncertain light of moon or stars, he unquestionably suggested. Fortunately, no accurate marksman ever happened to shoot at Bill, or perhaps the excitement of finding a lion inside camp had an unnerving effect on usually steady hands.

Though the Roan was never visited by the sort of lion which justifiably inspires real and universal terror, stories of man-eaters were in constant circulation at sundowner and dinner party.



## *Starting with a Circus*

And the residence in Ndola of a retired prospector who was the hero of one of these seemed to bring his particular encounter with a lion that had been made murderous by hunger very close to home.

Some years before, this gentleman, on his prospecting travels, arrived late one afternoon at a small trading post which catered to nearby native villages. He found his old friend the trader in bed suffering from an attack of malaria, but was cordially urged to make himself at home on the settee in the livingroom of the little bachelor establishment.

Retiring early, the prospector fell at once into a deep sleep, from which he was abruptly jerked by the sound of his host's voice crying frantically for help. Hastily lighting an oil lamp, he was horrified to find the sick man on the floor by his bed, whence he had just been dragged in the jaws of a lion. The marauder had vanished, evidently through the low bedroom window, but the condition of its victim's right arm left no doubt as to its identity.

After firing his rifle in the hope of discouraging a return visit, the prospector shouted lustily for his friend's native boys, who lived in nearby huts. He only succeeded, however, in eliciting muffled word that none of them dared to venture out. Restoring his friend to bed alone was a difficult business, but the young man managed it somehow, bandaging the lacerated arm as efficiently as he could.

Realizing that a lion bold enough to make the initial attack might return in spite of his shot, he prepared to keep watch the rest of the night, establishing himself on a chair in the bedroom with a light on and his rifle across his knees.

A day of hard walking, however, had left him desperately tired,

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and after a while his heavy eyes closed in spite of himself. His sleep must have had a drugged quality this time, for when he was awakened again, the lion had actually dragged the sick man to the floor beneath a window of the livingroom. Unable to distinguish captor from victim, the prospector fired into the air from the bedroom door. His manœuvre had the desired effect; as the animal dropped its victim to leap through the window he shot at it hastily, but realized at once that it had got away.

This time he did not chance going to sleep again, after he had done his best for his now badly mauled friend. He walked the floor till early dawn, when he went to the compound, rifle in hand, to send a boy off on a bicycle for a mission doctor, speeding the reluctant messenger with an earnest promise to find him later, and use the rifle, in the event that the doctor failed to appear.

The distance to the mission in question was not great, and the woman physician stationed there arrived by bicycle in something over an hour. After attending to the wounded man, she joined his friend in a cup of tea, over which the latter described in detail the nightmare events of the preceding hours of darkness. Turning to set his cup down on the table, he concluded his narrative with a fervent comment on the blessed quality of daylight, in which such creatures as man-eaters no longer stalked abroad.

He turned back just in time for daylight to present him with an excellent view of an arresting scene.

The doctor faced him from a chair placed in front of a window. Through the aperture, from a reared-up position against the wall outside, the man-eater was in the act of directing a vicious swipe at the lady's unconscious back.



Listening years later to an account of that turbulent night and morning, it was still comforting to turn an uneasy glance from the window to a tawny skin spread on the floor at the narrator's feet. The reach from that other window had luckily been too long, the young prospector's rifle had been handy, and his aim, that time, had been true. A brief but bright sidelight on personality was cast by the only comment from the mission doctor that figured in the story.

'Oh, it was the lion,' she remarked, setting her teacup down as the reverberation of the shot died away. 'I wondered for a moment just why you were shooting me.'

Though buffalo were never present in large numbers in the bush immediately surrounding the copperfields, and were

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among the first animals to move out altogether as people moved in, two or three strays wandered back from time to time. Memory of a comment made at a long ago cocktail party was sobered when a young man from Ndola went out to hunt one of these. After wounding it slightly, he was foolish enough to attempt to follow it, to finish it off. His amateurish stalking was no match for that of the most deadly tactician in the bush. As its species usually does, the buffalo doubled back through the high grass and did the finishing off itself, from the rear.

Driving through the bush near the Kafue Flats on a holiday trip, Douglas and I had our only personal meeting with buffalo, when we came suddenly on a herd of three bulls and about two dozen cows. We were in a big lorry which we were taking through the rather thin bush itself, in the absence of a road to our final objective. I have never understood why the grazing herd let us approach it so closely—before we knew it there were buffalo in front and on both sides of us. We actually had to stop the lorry, a circumstance which afforded us much too close a look at the great heavy-shouldered beasts, with their massive horns that incongruously suggested thick hair parted in the middle. After staring uncertainly for a breathless moment or two, the herd wheeled and vanished together through the trees.

They vanished quite literally; the incredible speed and silence of their departure was even more unnerving than their close proximity had been, for it demonstrated only too plainly how terribly efficient their stalking could be.

It is not surprising, in view of the general human attitude toward reptiles, that these should have inspired us with more constant and intense dread than any other form of animal life

### *Starting with a Circus*

in the copperfields. The dangerous character of any large river was emphasized during our first month at the Roan, when a native boy was brought in to the compound hospital after a crocodile in the Kafue had wrenched his right arm off at the shoulder. The natives' fear of crocodiles is great, and the carelessness they exhibited at times was proportionately surprising. In shallow water near the bank the boy felt himself safe, but his mutilation served as general notice that there was no safety anywhere in such a river.

Nor was there always in a smaller one, as was demonstrated when a native woman, wading with several companions across a shallow tributary of the Kafue, left a leg in the jaws of another crocodile. The Luanshya, fortunately, was free of this curse.

Crocodiles, of course, could be reasonably avoided by the simple expedient of staying out of dangerous water, but the reptile life on land was a somewhat different matter. Snakes might be met almost anywhere; they were therefore regarded collectively as Public Enemy Number One, and against them all, indiscriminately, an active warfare was constantly waged. There were, of course, a great many perfectly innocuous ones, but these were as luckless in the copperfields as they are everywhere in such a country as Africa. A citizenry that knows it may meet death in snake form can scarcely be expected to give any serpentine appearance the benefit of the doubt.

The doom of the grass snake was the most inevitable, as the green mamba was the most intensely feared. Assurance that the mamba would only attack if the way to its hole were blocked was not, after all, very soothing, owing to a usual uncertainty as to just where its hole might be located.

Snakes, however, in their own earnest desire to escape notice,

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did not actually appear as incessantly as they were expected. My cat wasted her heroism sadly on two perfectly harmless specimens in my bedroom. I was present when the boys killed a puff adder in the yard of the Irwins' temporary house, and when Douglas disposed of a boomslang on the golf course. During a picnic, I once almost trod on a long, slender green snake that might or might not have been a mamba—it went away far too rapidly to be either killed or identified.

With one notable exception, these were the sum total of my personal experiences with snakes over a period of six years.

The exception occurred on another picnic, at the Kafue River. Stretched somnolently on a rug, I was suddenly roused by a noise that made me think a herd of elephant must be approaching across the dambo. Sitting up, I was bewildered to see nothing, and presently subsided again. When the sound came again it was more localized, and glancing sideways, I saw a snake slithering through the grass within a foot of my head. My ear's proximity to the ground and the dryness of the grass through which it was moving accounted for the noisiness of the creature's progress. I did not stop to consider this at the moment, however. The snake was the largest one I had ever seen outside a zoo, and my upward bound was the quickest I have ever made anywhere.

The snake slid into the tangled roots of the big tree under which we were picnicking, and which overhung the immediate bank of the river. In order to kill it, Douglas had to mount the roots and aim his rifle straight down. Watching breathlessly from the side, I was appalled when the shot was followed by a vicious lunge of a yard or two of snake at Douglas's leg. His agility in leaping backward, however, was fortunately even

### *Starting with a Circus*

superior to mine as I had risen from the ground. The lunge may have been a convulsive reaction rather than a strike, for in a moment the snake had dropped into the river, revealing the fact that the rifle shot had almost severed three feet of tail from the rest of the body.

It could still swim, however, until a shot into the water killed it by concussion. The corpse, retrieved for measurement, was identified as a ring-necked cobra; the neck being banded by a curious mark that was light on the dark back of the neck, dark on the light under side. It had a hood, but this lacked the spectacle markings associated with the Indian cobra. The creature's largest girth was seven inches, its length eight feet.

Another snake incident that occurred in the copperfields was chiefly interesting from a psychological point of view. Two men were driving from the Roan to Chambishi one day, when the windshield of their car suddenly struck a snake that was hanging from the limb of a tree.

There was a wild moment as the creature writhed convulsively before two startled faces; then it fell to the roadside and wriggled rapidly off into the bush. Recovering from the shock, the relieved driver presently remarked aloud that the windshield was spattered with ejected venom.

Receiving no reply, he glanced around to find that his passenger's face had gone perfectly white, and that he looked as if he were going to be sick. He was very sick, shortly—but not in the way the other expected. By the time Chambishi was reached he had collapsed completely, and the doctor there found him suffering from severe symptoms of snakebite. He had not been bitten, the snake had never for a moment been inside the car, nor was there anywhere inside the slightest trace

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of venom. It nevertheless took some time to bring him around.

After his recovery it was found that he had once been alone with a man who had died of snakebite, and the memory of that experience had done the rest.

In implying earlier that the wild monkey tribe uniformly furnished nothing but entertainment, I do an injustice to its largest representative in the bush. The baboon's reputation is that of an intelligent animal, which only attacks man in self-defence. Its looks, however, are against it. The body of a full-grown baboon is three and a half feet long. Its size, its long, dog-like nose, its pouched cheeks, its tiny eyes set deep under huge brows, its long teeth, with its ugly habit of baring them, and its naked, repulsive posterior, together form a frightening as well as a hideous ensemble.

Driven by hunger, baboons have been known to kill sheep and other domestic animals for food, and a troop out in the bush near the Roan once seized a pet fox terrier that was attending a picnic and pulled it to pieces for no apparent reason beyond the pleasure involved in doing so.

It was largely a memory of this episode that made my own encounter with the troop of baboons that lived in the bush near the Victoria Falls Hotel the most unpleasant one I had with any animal in Rhodesia.

It was very hot one day during our stay at the Falls then, and immediately after lunch I ignored the hotel's rule that its beautiful outdoor swimming pool should only be used when a lifeguard was on duty, and went in to cool off. I left Douglas following the example of everyone else in the place by having a siesta.

When I started to practise the dead man's float I was en-



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tirely alone at the pool, which was set about a hundred yards from the hotel and was surrounded on three sides by a high, thick stone wall. Only at the end overlooking the bush and the river beyond did the wall become a low coping.

When I came up from my float, the immediate rim of the pool was occupied, on all four sides, by baboons. They were squatting on their haunches, shoulder to shoulder, and every eye was fixed intently and enigmatically on me.

I had often seen the Falls troop of baboons before, when they emerged from the bush to look for food around the hotel kitchens, or to squat in a silent row on the lawn and gravely return the regard of guests seated on the verandah at sundowners. They undoubtedly gave the place a picturesque touch, and were tolerated by the hotel for that reason. If anyone left the verandah and walked toward them, they always retired, under the rear-guard supervision of the hoary old grandfather of the tribe.

With the usual angle of observation reversed, the baboons' picturesque quality was nil, and their willingness to retreat if a lone person swam instead of walking toward them was doubtful. I tried the experiment, tentatively, but when there was no sign of giving way in the row before me, I returned hastily to the centre of the pool.

Screaming proved even less successful. The thunder of the Zambesi was loud, and it was plain that a voice had little chance of carrying past the high walls of the pool even if anyone in the hotel were awake to hear it. The grandfather ape and several others reacted unfavourably to the scream by baring their teeth, so I decided to save my breath for keeping above water, which panic was fast making a difficult feat.

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It is hard to say just how long the baboons were there, because it seemed to me like eternity. Wonder if they could swim, doubt of my own ability to stay up much longer, and visions of that massacred fox terrier, had all merged into a single incoherent terror by the time the miracle occurred.

Suddenly, for no apparent reason, every monkey head turned briefly in one direction. Then, as one monkey, the whole troop rose and moved off. They went so quickly over the low coping that the last one had disappeared before I grasped what had sent them—the sound of footsteps on the gravel walk from the hotel.

The footsteps belonged to Douglas who, on waking up, had guessed where I had gone. He says that he felt no conscious warning of trouble, though I cannot help believing that a telepathic message may have reached him in his sleep. Perhaps I was perfectly safe all the time among those baboons, but I have never, before or since, felt in such urgent need of help.

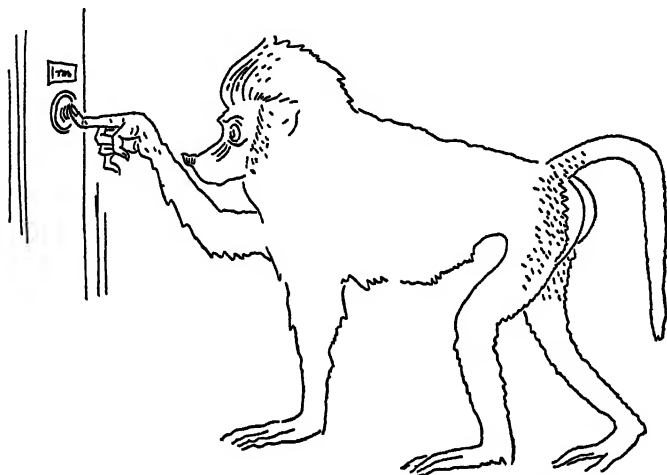
The most distinguished animal behaviour ever observed in the copperfields was exhibited, after our departure from the Roan, by another baboon; and I feel that the incident may be of some significance in indicating the ultimate effect that increasing civilization may have on the wild denizens of the bush.

Its occasion was furnished when the Provincial Commissioner's wife, entertaining at Ndola in honour of some important visiting dignitaries, gave an afternoon tea on the lawn of the official residence. The function was at its formal height, when a mammoth baboon emerged from the bush at one side of the house and advanced across the lawn toward the correctly graded circle of seated participants. Formality came to an

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abrupt end when the circle rose, screaming, and fled into the house without regard to any proper order of precedence.

The baboon restored, in a measure, the atmosphere its entrance had dispersed by the elegance with which it now con-



ducted itself. It ate the remaining sandwiches and cakes without undue haste, squatting in its hostess's abandoned chair by the tea table to suck the sugar lumps thoughtfully, drink the cream, and sample some of the tea. Its manners become deplorable only once, when disappointment in the taste of a slice of lemon caused it to bare its teeth and spit briefly but eloquently. When nothing was left but the lemon, it waited a polite interval before returning to the bush; and its involuntary hostess, watching with her other guests from a window, said that she felt quite remiss in not offering it an after-tea cigarette.

That evening the official residence was the scene of a dinner party for the same visitors. The hostess had just finished dress-

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ing and come into the front hall when the doorbell rang to announce the arrival of the first guests. Once it began, the ring did not stop, and, aware of the bell's tendency to stick, the hostess did not wait for a boy, but hastened to the door herself to release it quickly.

With the door open, she found that the mechanism was far from caught. It was being pressed steadily by a dark, hairy finger—the finger of her tea party's uninvited guest.

The newspaper writer who reported this event added the comment that any animal, after enjoying tea so much, could only be expected to look forward with pleasure to dining at the same house. It seems rather a pity that sociability should have been the thing to prove a wild animal's undoing—though perhaps the shot that answered the baboon's refusal to leave the door may sound a timely warning to too eager social aspirants of another species.



## ***He's Got Ants***

I WAS WATCHING the finals of the annual men's singles tennis tournament one day not long after my arrival at the Roan. It was disappointing. The well-modulated but admiring cries which usually furnished a running accompaniment to the defending champion's performance on the court were conspicuous in their absence. By the end of the second set the champion was well on his way to becoming a former champion and was losing his title, unaccountably, to a decidedly inferior player.

'What on earth's wrong with old Cecil?' A spectator put the question to his companion while the contestants were changing courts.

'He's got ants,' was the laconic, and what seemed to me the not very explanatory, reply. It evidently satisfied the inquirer, however, for he nodded in gloomy acquiescence and expressed no further surprise when the match ended shortly in old Cecil's completely inglorious defeat.

A night or two later the mess dance was enlivened by the

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antics of a young man whom, though I had never seen him before, I had no trouble in identifying as a young man in his cups.

'Dear me,' I presently heard a disapproving feminine voice behind me exclaim. 'How can Harold make such an exhibition of himself? I should never have believed it possible!'

'Mustn't be too hard on the poor fellow,' came her partner's more tolerant comment. 'It's only because he's got ants, you know.'

On still another occasion someone brought a new camera to a picnic and exhausted a roll or two of film on the picnic party. Though the resulting suggestions of ectoplasm peering furtively out of a heavy fog would have been warmly welcomed at a spiritualistic séance, they did not come up to the highest standards of photography. I wondered aloud whether the trouble lay in the focus or the exposure.

It lay in neither, I was not altogether astonished to learn. It lay in the fact that the camera had ants.

When the car in which we were attempting to reach the movies at Ndola one night came to an obstinate halt, there was, as may have been deduced from the foregoing, nothing whatever wrong with the engine, the carburetor, or the ignition system. It was simply that this rather aged product of Mr. Ford's well-known mechanical genius also had ants. And again, when a pet monkey of an ordinarily genial disposition turned to bite the kindly hand of its owner, it did so simply because it, too, had ants.

The reason for the popularity of this expression in the Rhodesian bush did not take long to make itself clear. The bush itself has ants. Ants ranging in size from that of a small-

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ish bee down to a species which has often given me the startled impression that the grains were marching out of the sugar bowl under their own power. Ants that fly, that crawl, that burrow, that bite, that sting. Black ants, red ants, brown ants, grey ants, white ants.

There are, of course, a great many other insects in the bush too. Most of these fall automatically into the nuisance class, though by no means all. The copperfields insect community had its more engaging members.

I think with nothing but pleasure of the companies of small caterpillars that used to stroll across the golf course, nose to tail, in long, fuzzy green lines, and that went to sleep curled into a huge, symmetrical spiral. And of the weird praying mantis, existing in countless sizes, up to the astonishing specimen whose body, with a girth about that of a pencil, measured a foot in length. And of the flocks of pale yellow butterflies that so often fluttered, like a fall of primrose petals, over a dusty bush road. And if nerves could withstand the initial shock of an encounter with a goliath beetle as large as a new cake of toilet soap, the geometrical arrangement of black and white on



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its back was worth a close scrutiny by anyone with a feeling for design.

Even the locust swarms, whose settling could devastate a vast area, and whose passing overhead was capable of darkening the sun for several hours at a time, left me with at least one bright memory.

Walking through the bush on an early July morning, Douglas and I once came out into a dambo in which a swarm had settled the preceding evening. It belonged to the species known in Rhodesia as Egyptian locusts—big red fellows with bodies three inches long, and two pair each of long, transparent wings. Every tree along the edge of the bush was covered with locusts, every blade of grass in the dambo bowed low under its heavy insect festoon. Powerless as yet to rise and fly away, the whole swarm was beating its wings frantically in an effort to dispel the fettering effect of the night's chill.

When settled locusts cover an object the term is quite literal. No inch of brown bark or twig, of green leaf or grass, showed anywhere. We had stepped incredulously into a rose-coloured landscape, which was given a jewelled overtone and was quickened to a strange and beautiful life by the incessant fluttering in the early morning sun of those myriad gauze wings.

Most of the insects encountered in the bush, however, were markedly lacking in charm. Their friend-winning capacity was practically nil.

Among the least charming was the *matakini*, or jigger flea, a microscopic creature which originated in the dust and worked its way up in the world via the human toe. Once snugly ensconced under a layer of skin it made provision for the future of its race by laying a sac of eggs. The involuntary host



## He's Got Ants

was shortly seized by a violent itching and burning sensation in the occupied area. If he were wise he arranged for the evacuation of his unwelcome guest before the eggs had time to produce a colony of similar guests, all bent on laying further eggs.

A grim little tale is told in Rhodesia of a man who once acquired a *matakini* during a visit to the country. He refused to have it removed, on the grounds that he wished to show his English family this unique souvenir of travel in far places. It is said that his remains, following an acute case of septicæmia, were lowered over the side of the homeward-bound ship—leaving the name of 'Matakini Forbes' to enjoy a doleful immortality in Rhodesian lore.

An experienced European, invaded by a *matakini*, usually haled in the nearest member of his black domestic staff. Roving *matakini* found perpetual sanctuary in bare black feet; constant practice in their removal from his own pedal extremities gave every boy an almost uncanny mastery of the technique. It was a very special one, because the slightest false move would puncture the egg sac, scattering its contents disastrously.

The routine followed in a *matakini* operation seldom varied to any great extent. The patient carefully sterilized one end of a darning needle and handed it to the boy. The latter grasped the instrument by its sterilized end, and set quickly to work with the other.

The operator's fingers might be thick and clumsy in the ordinary usages of civilized life; he might over the past week or so have established a new record in the smashing of crockery, or of even more substantial household equipment,



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but he never by any chance broke that tiny, fragile sac of *matakini* eggs. And, though a toe accustomed to the protection of a shoe is a sensitive member, and a noticeable hole was always left in it, you were seldom anything but amazed when he held the sac up for admiring inspection, delicately impaled on the end of the needle. His suddenly deft and gentle touch had not caused you appreciable pain; nor, for some reason, the explanation of which I will leave to the medical profession, did any harm ever seem to come of his total disregard of every known law of antisepsis.

The malarial mosquito's objectionable qualities are too well-known to require any further expansion here. With no area of infection near the copperfields, the local tsetse fly at least did not transmit sleeping sickness; it could, however, and often did, administer a businesslike sting. Between the sting of the enormous hippo fly and the hearty jab of a pin, I thought there was little to choose. As neither of these insects was sufficiently sportsmanlike to buzz a warning of its approach, the victim's pain was usually sharpened by his acute and outraged surprise.

Scorpions were not plentiful enough in the bush to make it advisable, as it is in some places where they live, to shake out a pair of shoes every morning before putting them on. The Rhodesian scorpion's bite was said to carry enough poison to cause an adult's limb to swell, or to make a very young child feverish, but I never heard of any death, or even serious illness, resulting from it.

The tarantula was insignificant in size, compared with the huge specimens found in southern Arizona; it was not even as large as the local hunting spider, whose flat body would have

## *He's Got Ants*

concealed a fifty-cent piece, and whose leg-spread was often a good four inches. The hunting spider's attitude toward the human race was amiable, and it was actually an asset in any home because of its efficient disposal of other insects. But to the uninitiated it presented an awesome appearance.

In the temporary camp at the Roan, Mrs. Ogilvy, wife of one of the compound officials, lived in a house, the thatched roof of which was companionably occupied by a colony of hunting spiders. One afternoon she entertained at tea in honour of a newcomer to the mine, Mrs. Cartright. The latter was drinking her tea, listening to the pleasant chit chat between two ladies seated near her, when a moving object in the air before her suddenly caught her glance. This, she perceived in a moment, was a large, black spider, which was engaged in lowering itself rapidly on a long strand of web directly over Mrs. Ogilvy's lap.

Mrs. Cartright was a person who had never been able to regard even a small spider with anything approaching equanimity; this one looked to her horrified eyes the size of a tennis ball. She wanted to scream a warning, to leap to the rescue of her unconscious hostess, but muscles and vocal cords alike refused to function.

In another moment the other guests had all jumped in unison, and turned to gaze at her in open-mouthed surprise—she had exited from an intolerable situation by dropping her teacup with a clatter and fainting dead away.

The spider at this moment reached the level of Mrs. Ogilvy's eyes, apprising her of the probable cause of Mrs. Cartright's seizure. Mrs. Ogilvy's residence in Rhodesia had antedated the opening of the copper mines by a number of years, an

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experience which had left her with little serious aversion to any of God's smaller creatures, and had also developed in her a certain ability to deal with the unexpected in social life.

She disposed of the spider efficiently but kindly, by clapping her hands under it and crying, 'Scat!' As the insect started its retreat towards the roof, she swept the flowers from the vase decorating the tea table with one hand, and dashed the water in the face of her recumbent guest of honour with the other.

Borers, industriously putting small round holes in wooden furniture, could be spotted by the neat little cone of sawdust which appeared on the floor under each instance of their persistent carpentry. Even when spotted, though, a borer was difficult to deal with, owing in the first place to its intelligent pursuit through wood of a curved rather than a straight course. I have tried immersing the bored object in liquid insecticide, a challenge which the borer answered by blowing a protective bubble, behind which it waited for normal atmospheric conditions to be restored. It almost always won in the end, because it could stand the watery siege a great deal longer than the average piece of furniture could.

Mopani bees were about half the size of ordinary houseflies. They did not sting, preferring a more subtle mode of attack which was always directed against the hottest, most perspiring human countenance within reach. On this they crawled round and round, on sets of tiny, powerfully adhesive feet. It was unpleasantly necessary to kill them on the site of their maddening activity, their own fanatic zeal prompting them to prefer death to the dishonour of retreat.



## *He's Got Ants*

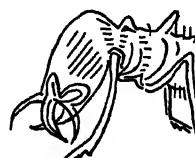
But all the other insects and all their works paled into insignificance beside the chief member of the Rhodesian insect tribe—the ants.

Prominent among these were a large black species and a small red one. I group them together because both lived underground, remaining fairly stationary during the dry season, but emerging in hordes with the beginning of the rains to forage for food, to conduct raids on termite colonies, or to attend to other business of the insect world.

The march of a colony of ants had an inexorable quality about it that was appalling. It moved in a solid column often a yard or two wide, and I shall not venture to say how long—beyond that I once kept a fascinated eye for an entire day on a black one that was crossing a fairway of the Roan golf course. Its head had disappeared into the bush before I came out at ten in the morning; at six in the evening the end was not yet in sight.

The column narrowed and deepened to pass along a small gully, and again between two trees—at these points the ants simply piled up on each other's backs, several inches deep—then it spread out again where the ground was flat, but it never slackened pace and not once during the eight hours did it alter its over-all shape. It was like a dark river emanating from some inexhaustible source, moving toward the fulfilment of some inscrutable destiny.

The conduct of the golfing public that day was almost as regimented as that of the ants. From my vantage point on the clubhouse verandah I watched each party reach the tee, gaze



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dubiously at the living hazard banding the fairway a little way ahead, and decide that a drive from the other side of it, if inglorious, was safer. The sole touch of variety was furnished by the individual style of broadjump subsequently employed to reach the other side.

A house that happened to stand in the line of march was not regarded by migrating ants as a serious obstacle; if the owner were fortunate enough to observe the massed approach, he could force a detour by building a fire at his door—otherwise there was little for him to do but move out until the invaders had passed through.

The manoeuvring of the soldiers that marshalled a column through the bush was a fascinating performance to watch, and a raid on a termites' nest furnished more drama than the average moving picture of human warfare; but it was always best for the observer to remain at a respectful distance, lest he himself suddenly become a major objective. Nor was it wise during the ants' restless season to walk about the bush with the eyes up, no matter how admirable the resulting posture might be. To step accidentally into one of those moving columns was far too easy.

An encounter with black ants was unpleasant enough, with the soldiers nipping and the civilians swarming hysterically about your person. But in spite of the more impressive look given them by their size, the black ants were nothing like as formidable as the red ones.

Every member of a red ant horde was both armed and ferocious, and their method of attack was as distinctive as it was disconcerting. They swarmed all over a victim instantly, but

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never bit singly, appearing, rather, to wait for a signal, upon receipt of which the entire swarm bit in vicious unison.

If there were enough of them, or if they were not removed with sufficient speed, the red ants were quite capable of putting an adult to bed for a day or two. The quickest way to get rid of them was a plunge into water. But water was seldom conveniently available during such a crisis, and the only other effective course was to strip hastily and set without delay about the business of picking the ants off. They had to be picked; brushing was quite ineffectual. Their hold was so tenacious that a body was sometimes twisted off, leaving the head behind to cause further trouble.

I speak with deep personal hatred of red ants; though I only got into a nest of them once the single experience was quite enough. Douglas and I were clambering up the difficult side of a stone kopje on a Sunday morning when the sensation of having become a cushion for a thousand red hot needles suddenly overtook me. It was not practical to remove my clothing on the spot, the face of the rock we were negotiating at the moment being fairly close to the perpendicular. I did not waste much time, however, about adjusting this condition. Douglas said later that my ascent to the top of the kopje could probably have been duplicated only by a klipspringer, the antelope known to the natives of the region as 'the-little-one-that-leaps-and-leaps.'

There was a species of ant which had an interesting habit of clinging to the under side of dead leaves and beating out a dry, rhythmic tattoo. It was an ominous sound; the first time I heard it I found it hard to believe that I was not confronted by a rattlesnake in full rattle. I turned over a leaf one day to

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find out just how the noise was made, but when I perceived that the ants were smallish and red I hastily dropped both the leaf and the idea of carrying out any further research on the subject. I have been told since, I do not know how accurately, that the insect clings to the leaf with its foremost pair of feet, using its whole rear quarters as a drumstick.

The bush harboured one more notable black ant. If left intact this creature was harmless enough, but a squashed specimen produced an aroma, the power and quality of which would have made any self-respecting skunk feel sheepish. It was known locally by the simple descriptive name of 'stink ant.'

I have no idea how many different sorts of food ant I encountered in the copperfields, because a new type was always turning up when I thought I had made the acquaintance of every possible variety. Suffice it to say that the legs of our ice-boxes, cupboards, and kitchen tables always rested in cans of water in an endeavour to eliminate these myriad creatures from our diet. The precaution was by no means sure-fire, for the boys were always letting the water in the cans dry up, and spiders, who appeared to be whole-heartedly on the side of the ants, were always building convenient bridges for them between walls and furniture.

It seems to me peculiarly appropriate that I should close this chapter with mention of termites, for one of my chief impressions of the Rhodesian copperbelt was that the termite usually had the last word.

And very likely will continue to have. A single termite, or white ant, is a blind, worm-like, miserably vulnerable creature, which can be squashed by the application to its soft person of the slightest pressure. But what, after all, is the use of applying



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pressure to a single termite when the queen of its colony, walled securely in a dark cell many yards below the surface of the ground, is busy laying a new egg every second?

What is the use of excavating laboriously for that queen when her subjects probably have several spare queens on hand, held in reserve against just such an emergency? What, even, is the use of exterminating an entire termite colony when the endless tunnellings of other colonies riddle the ground below its surface, and innumerable giant hillocks pimple it above?

It has been said that but for the relentless war which true ants have waged on white ants over a period of centuries the latter might now be in sole possession of our planet. The possibility of a termite inheritance of the earth did not seem at all fantastic in Rhodesia; it was only too easy to see in them and their subterranean activities a sinister threat to man's very existence. If they ever should be exterminated I am sure that the true ants will be responsible; man is far too flimsy and frivolous a creature successfully to combat a race which, to the sombre purpose of perpetuating a dark existence of ceaseless toil, has sacrificed sight, sex, and every other right of its individual members.

It was not only necessary to cope with the Rhodesian termites themselves, but with their giant nests, or anthills, that protruded everywhere among the houses of any European settlement. The mine townships were no exception to this rule, for blasting anthills away is an expensive game—one that not even a mining company goes in for in a bigger way than is absolutely necessary.

The anthills left standing in the townships were given added scenic prominence by the fact that so many trees had been

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taken out to insure the safety of electric wires, and they were still further emphasized because the slicing off rather than the entire removal of one of them frequently made room for the placing of a house or the passage of a street.

Such slicing left on the remaining fragment of cone an uncompromisingly ugly face of raw, reddish brown mud cement. Up against a house, this was mercifully concealed from general view by the house itself, though the occupants of the latter were often forced to regard it, morosely, through a window. Along each side of every street, mutilated anthills were all too conspicuous.

The great mounds were not without their uses. Their cement-like substance made a practically indestructible surface for a tennis court; they formed almost the entire stock of hazards on the flat Roan golf course, and with the tops sawed off were impressed into further service as pulpit tees and elevated greens. Douglas and I parked our car in the cavity hollowed out of a tremendous cone in our back yard, and the mine used the interior of another hill as a place in which to teach new underground boys the use of picks, shovels, and drills.

Some of the older anthills had been deserted by the termites that built them. When an occupied one was invaded, the colony inside simply walled up the exposed ends of their passages and drove new ones down into the ground below. They already had numerous tunnels going down, of course; the queen's chamber was often well under the conical superstructure. Where a car was garaged in a tenanted anthill, however, it could not be left standing idle for too long at a time, for in this case the termites, finding themselves undisturbed, would get to work on the vehicle in a serious way, instead of retreating.

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The question of what to do with the anthills in the garden was one that had to be answered by every householder in a township. That there was to be a garden went without saying, for there is, I think, something in the air of Rhodesia that creates an urge to garden in the most unlikely breasts. A person who has never before looked between the pages of a seed catalog, or laid hold of the business end of a trowel, begins to raise flowers before he or she has been there any time at all. Perhaps the combative element in human nature is responsible, for if there is a land on earth in which the practice of horticulture forms a thoroughly discouraging occupation, the Northern Rhodesian bush, with its uneven rainfall, its lack of fertile soil and its myriad insect pests—notably its termites—is that land.

In a large yard where the natural growth on the anthills happened to be attractive, the problem of how to deal with them was simplified, for there they could be left untouched to form a natural background for more formal planting. The Irwins chose the site of their permanent house at the Roan with an eye to the position in the surrounding grounds of eight mammoth mounds, on each of which grew, along with other attractive foliage, several large trees. Beautiful in themselves, these hills formed a perfect natural screen around the rambling, white, green-roofed house, at the same time allowing intriguing glimpses of the garden to be caught here and there. The Assistant Manager's wife turned a group of three equally beautiful anthills in her large yard into a pastoral spot by leaving them intact and covering the surrounding ground with transplanted wild flowers.

But the houses occupied by most of the mine employees were

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set close together on fifty-foot lots. On such a lot an anthill covered with bush growth could be rather overpowering, especially when the growth itself possessed no great beauty of its own. One anthill might be a graceful bouquet of ferns, vines, flowers, and trees; another was simply a tangled, untidy mess. A cone covered with bamboo was decorative during the rains; in the dry season a patch of dead cornstalks would have been quite as desirable in the garden.

It was in the treatment of such anthills that the real problem lay, and out of it a definite landscape technique began to develop in the mine townships. Though this reached beauty only occasionally during my stay at the Roan, it was always interesting, because it was so inseparably a part of the land that gave it birth.

On my way to the office every morning I passed an anthill before which I could never help pausing for a few goggle-eyed moments. Grass on the top and down the sides formed a head of golliwogg-like hair. Inside this frame, whitewashed stones and small plants formed the features of a large, pear-shaped face—a face which returned my fascinated scrutiny with an understandable look of disgruntled surprise. I always felt a little shaken after my encounter with this fancy, which originated, surprisingly, in the brain of a rather stolid South African Dutchwoman.

My poise was restored a little farther along the road when I came to the anthill which looked like a carelessly flung down heap of brilliant pink petunias, which covered the cone completely and ran out exuberantly over the surrounding ground. I can't ever remember seeing a cultivated anthill look so alto-



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gether charming, or petunias as if they were having such a thoroughly delightful time.

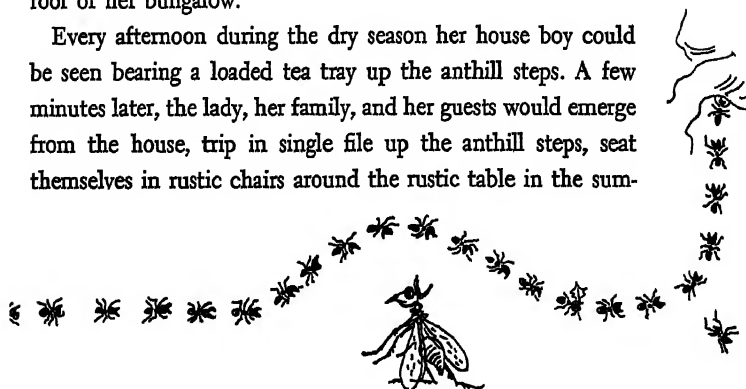
Logically enough, a good many anthills in the Roan township were treated as rock gardens, though the symmetry of the hills made the result, I thought, rather too stilted. I have never, however, been an ardent admirer of the rock garden per se, so perhaps my opinion in this matter is of little value.

A Frenchwoman, who had lived in the southern Congo where anthills also abound, turned their very symmetry to arresting account. She cut a series of terraces around each of the half dozen large mounds with which her yard at the Roan was endowed. She then planted flowers in circles from top to bottom, using a different variety and colour of blossom on each circular terrace.

Before the plants matured the yard looked rather like a giant confectioner's shop, full of huge, chocolate-covered wedding cakes. Later, with the flowers in full bloom, the hills resembled a collection of the stiff, round bouquets belles of another era carried to balls. The sole item necessary to complete the piquant illusion was a frill of lace paper around the base of each hill.

An Englishwoman with practical ideas cut steps up the side of an enormous anthill, sawed the top off and crowned it with a rustic summerhouse, which stood almost on a level with the roof of her bungalow.

Every afternoon during the dry season her house boy could be seen bearing a loaded tea tray up the anthill steps. A few minutes later, the lady, her family, and her guests would emerge from the house, trip in single file up the anthill steps, seat themselves in rustic chairs around the rustic table in the sum-



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merhouse, and drink their tea. It is practically impossible to create a really cozy atmosphere on top of a sawed-off cone; those lofty tea parties always had an over-exposed and faintly uneasy look about them. But there is little doubt that they represented the ultimate domestication of the Rhodesian ant-hill.

No matter what was done to the exterior of an occupied hill, however, the termite life inside and all through the surrounding earth went inexorably on. It was the common fate of every Rhodesian gardener to spend weeks bringing some treasured plant to maturity, and then to come out one morning and find it lying withered and dead, its roots neatly sawed off just below the surface of the ground.

If the termites had confined their attention to the great outdoors, even including the gardens, we might have worked things out with them on a fairly amicable basis of live and let live. But, as more and more people are becoming personally aware since these insects have invaded the temperate zone, they are avid consumers of building material, and there are few objects to be found inside a house which fail to afford them nourishment.

In the permanent Roan township, an 'antcourse,' or flat sheet of metal which protruded several inches all round, was laid between the foundations and the floor of every house. This, and the other precautions taken, reduced the indoor activity of the white ants to a welcome minimum, but did not altogether put an end to it. Methods of getting past the antcourse were constantly being evolved by the resourceful insects, and any house left standing empty and quiet was sure to be attacked within a few days. Whenever a family went away on

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holiday the vacant premises were inspected regularly for signs of invasion.

In the temporary houses the termites enjoyed a perpetual field day, not only eating the actual houses diligently, but frequently demolishing their contents. One of the most disconcerting aspects of the situation was presented by the fact that, although you were, in these houses, constantly confronted by havoc, you seldom saw the creators of it, a circumstance which often gave you the eerie feeling that supernatural forces rather than living creatures were at work.

The perfectly logical explanation of their invisibility lay, of course, in the termites' own determination to operate in the dark, and the consummate skill with which they could leave intact the outer shell of a completely gutted structure. I have been assured that it is possible during the silence of night to hear the million jaws of a termite colony eating its way through the walls of a house; but I think it must require keen and experienced ears to detect and recognize the sound, which was once described to me by a gentleman of Cockney antecedents as a 'low, 'orrid swish.' Most of us at the mine, however, who shared the temporary houses with the termites were only apprised of the exact location of a colony when a section of wall or floor caved in and the carpenter shop had to come to our rescue with some new Kimberley brick.

Around any exposed object the white ants constructed their own protective shell of mud cement. They had enclosed my complete brown leather set of O. Henry before I noticed anything amiss on the bookshelves, and on another occasion they left a perfect, though empty, replica of its head on the end of one of Douglas's wooden golf clubs. Perhaps in justice to

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the whole breed I should also mention the termite colony which, during my first December at the Roan, quietly and rapidly ate my mosquito boots. This tactful action enabled me to wear my best slippers to the Christmas dances; my salute to the usual mud shell on my cupboard floor was prompted, for once, by pure gratitude.

The hills occasionally built indoors afforded an excellent gauge of the incredible speed with which termites worked. Our neighbour's wife, swinging her feet briskly out of bed one morning, sprained a toe on the solid, six-inch cone which had been thrown up on the floor since she had retired the evening before. Every morning for months we broke off a similar structure that protruded horizontally from the pantry wall and saturated the wall with a compound sold by the local trading stores as a termite exterminator. Every night the insects, unimpressed by the anti-social character of this fluid, restored their cone to its original proportions, which were about five inches in length and four in diameter at the base.

Only once a year do any white ants come out voluntarily into the open, in which they can only survive for a few minutes. These are the incongruous members of each colony which alone possess both wings and sex. Just at the beginning of the rainy season they burst, from one anthill after another, in dense, whirling clouds.

Such a flight, nuptial in intent if not accomplishment, is soon over; a few minutes after one has taken place the ground around the hill is whitened by a pile of lost wings and dying, wingless bodies. The bodies do not remain on the ground very long; too many other insects, birds, beasts, and even human beings are eagerly waiting to attend the annual feast. It is left



## *He's Got Ants*

for the rain to wash away the litter of wings, the final trace of that strangest and most futile of matings.

A personal encounter with a flight was like being caught in a blizzard in which some indescribably soft and repulsive substance had taken the place of snow. The opening of a house door was risky at any hour while they were in progress; at meal times it meant that the unhappy diners were inevitably faced with the depressing spectacle of frustrated termite lovers expiring in the soup.

In the process of blasting away the anthills in the permanent Roan township, an extraordinarily large number of queen ants were brought to light. Human beings are seldom privileged to see one of these retiring females; it is quite possible to live in Rhodesia a great many years without doing so. I certainly had never seen one before I went to Rhodesia, a fact which accounted for my blithe promise to send one back to a scientifically minded American friend.

Reluctantly but conscientiously keeping my word, I placed a particularly revolting specimen of queen ant in a pickle jar filled with formalin. This much accomplished, I was at rather a loss as to how to proceed further. Would the royal lady qualify as first class matter en route to the United States, and what would be the most appropriate comments to make on her accompanying customs form?

A charming young couple from Boston who were passing through the copperfields stepped forward at this point and volunteered to bring the pickle jar back with them; its contents, they said, might well strike the keynote of a volume to be entitled, 'Across Africa with a Queen.' With reticence unusual to visitors to Africa they have not yet translated that

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thought into action, and, recalling my own shudders as I consigned the queen to her container, I am not altogether surprised.

Her blimp-like body was a good six inches long, by four in circumference. She was, actually, all body; her tiny head and legs, dangling incongruously and helplessly from widely separated points on her bulbous torso, were those of an ordinary ant. She was a dirty grey in colour and was encircled by a series of indented striations which made her look like an enormously fat woman buttoned tightly into a frock several sizes too small for her. Her skin, stretched so precariously over its contents, was greasy and repellent to even the most gingerly touch. She was, in short, a monstrosity of the first water, and even viewed through the protective walls of a pickle bottle I am afraid the note she struck on that long journey was decidedly sour.

No account of termite activity in the Rhodesian copperfields would be complete without inclusion of the Mystery of the Sixth Motor. This episode took place while the Roan construction period was at its hectic height. It began the day the first wing of the mill was ready for the installation of the electric motors which were to operate its complicated machinery.

The construction department put in a routine order for the motors to be delivered at the mill. The stores department, also following routine, took the motors from the storage yard and conveyed them to the mill on the platform of a lorry.

Procedure began to diverge from routine when construction called stores' attention to the fact that, whereas six motors were called for in the design of the mill wing, the lorry crew had only delivered five.

## He's Got Ants

'Kindly,' concluded construction, 'bring the sixth motor to the mill without further delay.'

The exchange of inter-office comment at once became brisk and shortly assumed a somewhat acrimonious tone; it soon expanded to include contributions from the purchasing department, which had ordered the motors in the first place.

For, it appeared, there was no sixth motor to bring to the mill.

Yet how could this be? The purchasing department's original order, now triumphantly produced, distinctly called for six motors. The stores' records showed that an even half dozen had been checked in when the shipment of motors had first arrived at the mine.

There certainly had once been a sixth motor.

'Then where,' the Construction Engineer reasonably enough inquired, 'the hell is it now?'

An electric motor is not an article easily lost, particularly one which, in its packing case, forms a four-foot cube and is heavy enough to require a derrick to lift it. These had awaited installation in the yard rather than in the warehouse because they were so patently immune from theft.

There seemed only one possible explanation of the disappearance. Motors were being installed for various purposes all over the plant; this one must have been hauled by mistake to the wrong place, off-loaded with other large equipment and subsequently forgotten. Agitated assistants and clerks scuttled about the property examining motors and peering into packing cases; while a steadily widening circle of baffled and annoyed department heads covered the situation in an exchange of increasingly interesting comment.

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The idea of buying a new motor and waiting for its delivery from England was repugnant to everyone concerned, but the day came when there was nothing else left to do.

The cable for a replacement was in the process of gloomy composition in the general office, when the motor turned up. It turned up in the precise spot in the storage yard where it had been placed on its arrival at the mine. From that precise spot it had in the meanwhile never once budged.

This peculiar circumstance is explained not by any lack of diligence on the part of those who had searched for the motor, but by the fact that an enterprising colony of white ants had adopted it as the foundation for a large anthill. Except for perhaps six inches of metal protruding inconspicuously from one side, the apparatus was completely hidden inside the giant cone of mud cement.

If the Construction Engineer walking across the storage yard that morning had not dropped a box of matches when he paused near the cone to light his pipe, the motor would undoubtedly still be entombed, since no one would ever have remarked the presence, among so many others, of one more anthill. As the Construction Engineer, however, stooped to retrieve his matches a glint of sunlight from that bit of exposed metal caught his eye.

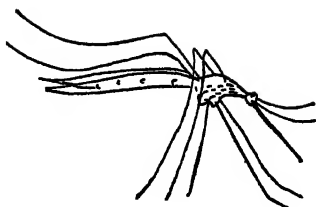
The motor, thoroughly incorporated in the hill, was extracted with some difficulty; its wooden packing case, presumably the original attraction to the termites, had been entirely consumed. The motor was found to be quite unimpaired—though I sometimes wondered if a careful ear might not detect a difference between its hum and that of all the other motors on the property. Not every modern machine has shared its experience,

### *He's Got Ants*

and a little mechanical excitement on its part would seem entirely justifiable.

Its companion motors, listening, need hum but one comment—the comment that covers every divergence from the normal in the Rhodesian copperfields:

‘Don’t mind him, boys—he’s got ants.’



## ***Football King***

'MY MOTHER!' cried Matches, letting an iron skillet fall to the table with a crash, so that he might clap his hands together ceremoniously as I entered the kitchen to give him his culinary instructions for the day.

I knew at once that something special was up. Instead of always calling me 'Mama,' as most boys did, Matches suited his form of address to various situations. In ordinary everyday routine I was all right as Mama. But as hostess to guests whom Matches considered at all impressive, I was 'Madame,' the elegant French pronunciation of which word he had picked up during a brief period of domestic service in the Congo. And when he had broken a dish, or needed a few shillings advanced on his wages, or perhaps felt an urge to spend an hour or so in the compound beerhall, I invariably found myself occupying the position of Matches' 'Mother.'

'Mother' accompanied by a handclap indicated a serious breakage, or a request for something of more than usual moment.

Perceiving no shattered fragments littering the kitchen this  
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morning, I was able to interpret the present situation correctly. Keeping my manner carefully noncommittal, I asked Matches what he wanted.

Matches put his hand into the pocket of his khaki tunic and drew out an envelope of the poisonous pink shade sold at the local Kaffir trading stores. It contained, he explained as he handed it to me, a letter he had just written to the Bwana M'kubwa. He would like me to read it, and, if I considered it couched in proper language, to take it with me when I went to the office.

The Bwana M'kubwa, of course, was Dave, who as General Manager was the 'Greatest Master' of the mining community. 'Just written' was purely a figure of speech; Matches had never learned to write, but dictated any thoughts that needed to be put down to a mission-educated friend named Teapot.

I drew the letter from the envelope curiously. For a moment I thought that Matches had made a mistake and put in an old shopping list of mine instead, but when the small sheet was unfolded I saw that he had simply made economic use of the reverse side.

Matches' elegant literary style was as familiar to me as were Teapot's elaborately ornate characters:

Luanshya Roan Mine  
N. Rhodesia  
25 April

Sir,

I have a great honour to stop down and to write you this few lines, Sir.

To let you know that we very needing Tracter Catepelar to

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clean our foot ball ground because there is not good now to play foot ball so much grass growing on.

So I shall be congratulate if this letter will be receive with your best favour.

With great honour to you, Sir, I am your humble servant.

Matches

(Cook boy for Mrs. Lucy Douglas Cullen)

(King for Prince of Wales Championship

Soccer Foot Ball Team for Luanshya)

So the rains were really over at last and the football season was about to commence. Recognizing the removal of excess grass from the compound soccer field as indeed a serious matter, I promised to deliver the letter and departed for the office a little later in a patter of grateful handclaps.

The status of football in the copperfields had been strongly impressed on my mind the day after my arrival at the Roan. I had then been rushed out to see a Rugby match between two European teams, one representing the Roan, the other made up of a miscellaneous collection of players from Ndola.

Actually, I saw very little of that particular contest. With the dry season nearing its end, the temporary field in the old camp did not boast a spear of grass. The players were consequently concealed most of the time in a dense cloud of dust, a good part of which must inevitably have been swallowed by them. Sitting in a car fifty yards from the side line, I swallowed quite a bit myself.

But at least I knew about football. Nothing but a Major Sport could have been played in that dust and in the prevailing temperature of a hundred and ten degrees Fahrenheit.



## *Football King*

The European population of the copperbelt played Rugby and soccer with equal enthusiasm. Each game now had its own permanent field in the new township, its own schedule of weekend matches with other members of its respective copperbelt league. One team often went to another mine and most of the local fans were strongly partisan to one game or the other. But it was not unusual for two matches to be played simultaneously on the home fields, the close proximity of which made it possible for an impartial and reasonably active observer to follow the progress of both.

That football was equally popular with the native boys who worked on the mines I could hardly have failed to be aware with Matches as my cook. During the previous season Matches had organized the Prince of Wales Team and, as its non-playing manager, had made a prominent place for himself in the copperfields football world.

Native football was confined to soccer. The more violent physical contact of Rugby had been found to have the effect of arousing emotion to such a pitch that a game usually turned into a tribal battle into which spectators as well as teams hurled themselves. Mine authorities had quietly but firmly eliminated Rugby from the compound sporting schedule.

There was another minor drawback to Rugby as played by the boys. A player in possession of the ball seeing his way to the goal blocked by members of the opposing team, often left the field altogether and galloped off through the bush with the rest of the players and the more agile spectators in hot pursuit. Sometimes it was a matter of miles before he was overtaken. The fact that there ever had been a field was forgotten by now, or it was considered too much trouble to return to it; and a

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goal-less, roving form of play was continued from the spot on which the ball was downed.

This was conceded to be rather hard on the less athletic spectators, who had paid good money to see a game and were now left stranded beside an empty field. To be a really successful spectator of native Rugby, it was necessary to possess the more salient characteristics of the bloodhound.

The round ball used in soccer is not carried, of course, but is propelled down the field by kicking or dribbling it with the feet and by striking it with any convenient part of the anatomy except the hands. The head is used extensively for striking, or perhaps more accurately, for butting purposes. The boys were well equipped by nature for the soccer technique. They always played barefoot in the copperfields, and their agile, muscular toes enabled them to execute a marvellously effective dribble. If their barefoot kicking did not always compare favourably with that of a well-shod European team, the hardness of their skulls made their butting compare more than favourably with a goat's.

The vivacity with which they played soccer presented an astonishing contrast to their languid manner of doing almost everything else. Only on dancing interminably around the evening fires in the compound did they ever seem to expend a comparable amount of energy. A number of teams from each mine belonged to an exceedingly active native league, and boys who had just put in an eight-hour shift of manual labour on the mine were out on the compound field every weekday afternoon, practising for the matches that took place every Sunday during the six dry months of the year.

Any soccer game is a lively affair, with a great deal of running and few appreciable pauses in the play. As played in the cop-

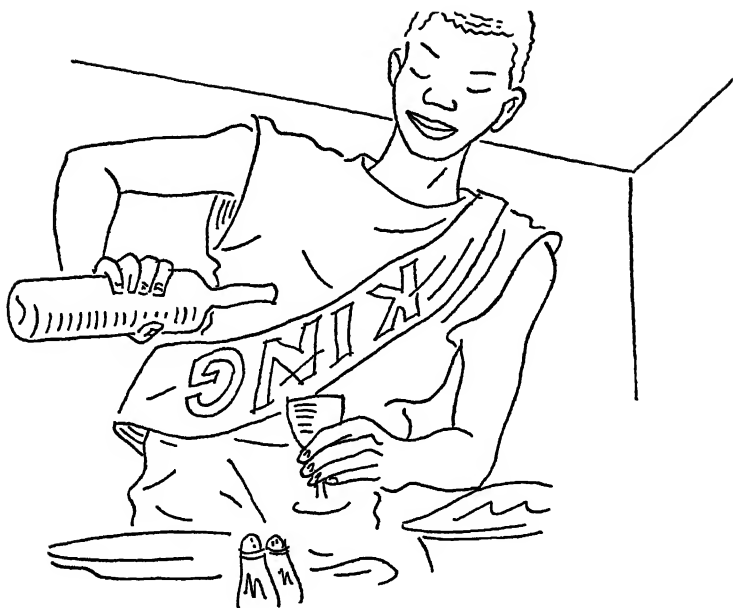
## *Football King*

perfields, a native game was bounded by no time limit; it usually started at noon and never by any chance ended until darkness made it impossible to see the ball any longer. No regular periods were observed during this time; perhaps twice in the course of a long afternoon two competing teams might pause by mutual consent for a short rest.

To play at one of the other mines a native team could hire a company lorry at a nominal rental. An out-of-town game meant a ride of anywhere from twenty to fifty miles over a rough bush road and a return the same night. As many spectators as the lorry would hold always went along too, so there was never room for anyone to sit down during the journey. Players and spectators not only stood up in the jolting vehicle, but sang lustily all the way over and back to the accompaniment of a drum which was always squeezed in somehow.

It would never have done, however, to leave the spectators at home, for their whole-hearted backing was an important adjunct to the game. The scoring of a goal was a signal for them to pour over the field in a dark flood, laughing, shouting, singing, leaping, and rolling on the ground, very much in the style of attendants at a coloured revival meeting in our south. They not infrequently gave their own side support of a more practical nature by forcibly removing an inept player, blocking a troublesome opponent, or knocking the ball in the desired direction.

As evidenced in his letter to Dave, Matches did not style himself 'manager' of the Prince of Wales Team. His precise relationship to this remarkable organization will probably always remain unique in the annals of sport. It was proclaimed to the world at large by a broad white ribbon which he wore



diagonally across his chest as he marched at the head of his team to the compound soccer field. On the ribbon, in big purple letters, appeared the simple but august legend: 'King.'

His official costume was completed by a purple headband which held several rather straggly turkey feathers in a more or less upright position above his brow. Matches was haunted by an earnest desire to share the glory of these decorations with Douglas and me; it was only with difficulty that he was restrained from adding them to his domestic uniform whenever we gave a dinner party. At such functions he was privileged as boss boy, to emerge from the kitchen long enough to pour the wine.

One evening, having managed to evade my usual inspection he appeared in the diningroom decked in his chest ribbon. His efforts on this occasion to prevent either Douglas or me from seeing it, while he made sure that it escaped the attention

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of none of our guests, were so interesting that I could not bring myself to exercise the proper discipline and make him take it off. In his haste he had unfortunately put the wrong end of the ribbon over his shoulder, causing the inscription to read backwards and upside down and producing an effect that was rather more cryptic than regal.

Matches was assisted in his management of the Prince of Wales Team by a number of lesser officials, whose titles, culled largely from the list of Northern Rhodesian government officers, were only a little less sonorous than his own. The Chief Secretary was his right-hand man, a species of assistant manager. The player who acted as captain was known as the General. The Native Commissioner rounded up the team for each game, the Police Commissioner was responsible for removing hysterical spectators from the field after a goal had been scored, and the Chief Medical Officer treated cuts and bruises incurred during play. The Banker fulfilled the functions of treasurer, and the Attorney General settled any arguments that arose with opponents over the matter of scores, penalties, and so on.

In his handling of finances Matches proved himself a super sports magnate. The small admission charged at the usual native game was divided between the two participating teams, who used it for general team expenses. There was no set admission when the Prince of Wales eleven played; but a collection was taken up midway through the game, on the theory, evolved by Matches, that spectators would contribute more than they were willing to pay in cold blood at the gate. If any reluctance to contribute was encountered, Matches simply called time out until the matter had been adjusted. The plan worked with

beautiful precision, its originator pocketing a major portion of the surplus funds it provided.

Beside the money thus obtained from the dark sporting public, Matches received a shilling from each member of his team every time it played and slightly larger amounts from his officials, the latter sums being regulated according to the importance of the official position. These payments were known as the 'game tax,' a description that struck me as highly inaccurate, because if a weekend during the football season passed without a game it was Matches' invariable custom to collect the tax anyway. When I sought to learn how he felt justified in following such a procedure he looked at me in surprise.

'I their King all weeks, Mama,' he explained, with a fascinating lack of logic, 'so they paying game tax all weeks.'

Matches derived further income from a final even more striking source. Whenever a disagreement arose between his players he acted as arbitrator, charging for his services a fee of half a crown from each individual involved in the dispute. His decisions were always rendered in an atmosphere of great judicial formality. Arrayed in feathers and chest ribbon, Matches majestically occupied a broken kitchen chair backed for security against the side of his hut. The arguing team members with their respective witnesses and supporters sat in a humble circle around his feet.

At first I was puzzled by the complacency with which the other boys accepted Matches' very high-handed and self-appointed leadership. Instead of chafing under the yoke of his authority, the Prince of Wales Team obviously regarded itself as a chosen people; an increasing number of envious outsiders

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besieged Matches with applications for membership in his group.

Some of the reasons for the success of his tactics became clearer as time went on.

The price he had set on it had given to a place on his team a definite, tangible value. Brotherhoods the world over have proven the irresistible appeal of grandiloquent titles. Nor was this all. The native African, with his creed which demands the same shape and colour of eye for eye, the same length and quality of tooth for tooth, is a born litigant who happily devotes endless hours to bringing the pros of any debate into a final featherweight of balance against the cons. By introducing the judicial element into the management of his soccer team Matches had achieved his final master stroke.

From the purely sporting point of view his methods left little to be desired. Because of his ability to select from the best local talent, Matches' team played an excellent brand of soccer. During its first season it established a creditable record of victories over teams from other mines.

In the second season, which opened with Matches' request to Dave for the company's usual help in putting the compound field in shape, it really hit its stride. By the end of September it had won every game it had played and loudly announced itself copperbelt champion.

The title was conceded by everyone except an Nkana eleven, with which, for some reason, the Prince of Wales Team had not come to grips. Hearing of the doubt cast on his claim, an indignant Matches wrote to Nkana. After an excited and rather incoherent exchange of letters a deciding match was arranged, to be played at Luanshya. The date set was rather late in

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October, when the rains would probably have started—but a football King's honour was at stake and not even an element could be allowed to interfere with its vindication.

The selected Sunday proved, after all, to be a fine day, though, as were all dry days in the rainy season, rather warm.

Firmly declining Matches' urgent invitation to be present for the whole game, Douglas and I promised to drive over to the compound late in the afternoon and watch its closing periods. Approaching the field about half past five, we saw that a record crowd had turned out. But why was it so silent and still? This unnatural state of affairs was explained when Matches, the trembling feathers in his head-dress reflecting his inner emotional tension, came over to tell us that though the contest had been going on for some five hours neither side as yet had been able to score.

We only saw a fraction of the soccer epic of the year, because its unexpected dénouement came within a half-hour of our arrival. I shall therefore leave a summary of events to Matches. He never failed to dictate to Teapot a report of each game in which his team took part, mailing these compositions to the small newspaper which was published weekly at Ndola. The editor of *The Copperbelt Times*, recognizing Journalism when he encountered it, often printed Matches' stories verbatim. He did so in the present immortal instance.

'Prince of Wales Championship Soccer Foot Ball Team for Luanshya,' reported Matches, 'and Victoria Falls Greatest Soccer Foot Ball Team for Nkana meat at Luanshya foot ball ground on 17 October. Game opened at 12.30 P.M. Falls Team started.

'There is one player on Falls Team who at start shooted hard.



## *Football King*

Ball went right up to Prince of Wales second goal named Spoon and good champion. No other player meat with it. Spoon kick very strong. Ball went back many times.

‘We play to 4 P.M. and rest. Not one team beat.

‘And we change goals. We play to 5.30 P.M. Prince of Wales Team very strong, unless Falls Team got tired. Falls Team second goal have been a first class foot ball player, but on that day became a useless. One young boy on Prince of Wales Team named White made him to fall down.

‘At 6 P.M. Prince of Wales Team player named Letter shootd many times. He shootd at that sport, he shootd ball, he assisted until reached to Falls Team goal keeper. But no Falls Team player were able to kick ball.

‘So Falls Team player named Salad made the plan. He stickd pin in ball. So she was flat. Game cannot finish.

‘We the Prince of Wales Team are very strong. We cannot be like any other teams as we win every players who are meating with us in every branches.

‘Falls Team stickd pin in ball because frighted to be beat. But is not right. To stick pin in is not for playing foot ball.’

Probably because of an inadequate English vocabulary Matches’ comments on the abrupt ending of the game gave little hint of his real feelings about it. He boiled with righteous wrath over the foul means taken by his opponents to stop the Prince of Wales Team from scoring the winning goal. For several days he and the sympathetic house boy held a practically continuous indignation meeting in the kitchen; when he was alone Matches could be heard muttering ominously to himself. His disturbed emotional state had a strong effect on our food,



which gave the distinct impression of having come out of a witch's caldron.

My memory had been stirred vaguely on Sunday by the sight of the flattened soccer ball. Somewhere I had heard or read that an American player had once let the air out of a pigskin and then had gone Salad one better by hiding it under his jersey and making a touchdown with it. I recounted the incident to Matches one day in the hope that it might serve to divert his mind. He had always, in the past, evinced great interest in happenings in the United States, which, possibly because it was so far away, he regarded as a glamorous and wonderful land.

His reaction to the American ball-deflating episode was gratifying. After listening closely to my original version he asked a number of questions which I answered as well as I could. It was the first willingness he had shown to discuss anything but Sunday's game and I left the kitchen feeling pleased with the

## *Football King*

success of my small strategy. When a normal atmosphere pervaded the kitchen next day and our meals no longer showed the unhappy results of preparation by an angry cook, I concluded that I had released Matches' mind permanently from its dark obsession and congratulated myself on being something of an amateur psychologist.

About two weeks passed before I knew the actual effect my story had produced on a football King's process of thought.

Matches greeted me one afternoon with the announcement that he had just had a fine piece of news in which he was sure that I, too, would be interested. Salad had consented to leave Nkana and come to find work at the Roan so that he could play on Matches' team next season. As a Prince of Wales player, Salad was to have a special duty—a very special duty.

When he had learned that it was done in the United States, went on Matches, in substance, and confirming the sudden premonition his opening remarks had brought me, he had realized that it must be all right, so Salad would devote himself to sticking a pin in the soccer ball whenever developments in a game made it seem best to do so.

No longer, however, would the eleven be known as the Prince of Wales Team. Matches had chosen a new name appropriate to the new style of play. Under my hypnotized gaze he unfolded another discarded shopping list and proudly exhibited the careful capitals Teapot had printed for him across the back.

Next year, I saw, my cook boy was to be King of the United States Championship Soccer Foot Ball Team for America. And now he was clapping his hands up and down in the gesture with which Africa extends greeting, says farewell or expresses thanks.

'My Mother!' cried Matches gratefully.



## Home Zoo

ONE OF THE MOST OBVIOUS things to have in the copperfields was a private zoo. It was, in fact, practically impossible not to have one if you started out with any weakness for animals. Native boys came into camp in a constant trickle selling small creatures they had snared or otherwise managed to capture in the bush. It was always hard to refuse such a purchase; you wanted to give a terrified adult back its freedom and the impulse to adopt a baby was almost irresistible. Even if you failed to fall victim to the infant's charms you were uncomfortably aware that it was not likely to fare very well left in the callous hands of the average native.

Our own zoo varied widely in number and personnel from time to time, reaching its peak during the months when, in addition to a male Great Dane, an Alsatian bitch and a cat whose kitten production was nothing short of phenomenal, we had a blue monkey, a river monkey, two antelope—one a duiker,

## *Home Zoo*

the other a stembok—and a pair of bush babies, male and female.

When Douglas brought two porcupines home one day to add to this collection I regretfully drew the line. It was not that I objected to the porcupines, a charming, already domesticated pair whose unusual native owner had ingeniously taught them to put up their quills on command; but a line had to be drawn somewhere.

Adoption was often discouraging, due largely to feeding difficulties. We never managed to work out the correct diet for a baboon, a civet cat, a mongoose or a young bush baby. On the other hand, though an extremely delicate stomach makes an antelope among the hardest creatures to raise, and we had approached the problem with strong misgivings, our two surprised us by enjoying perfect health for six months. We were congratulating ourselves on having pulled them through the critical stage when the stembok vanished completely and mysteriously one night, and a few days later a well-meaning but misguided child presented the duiker with a banana.

There was, from my own point of view, a mitigating factor in their loss. Having early learned to associate me with the milk bottle, both antelope always greeted me by butting me joyfully and urgently in the shins. Two rock-like little skulls reinforced by one pair of embryo horns made this an exceedingly painful performance; long after the butting had ceased my shins retained vivid souvenirs in black and blue.

Monkeys were the copperfields' most common pet. A playful, affectionate disposition made the little brown river monkey especially popular, though even in this amiable species a male, if unmated, was apt to turn sour and misanthropic with ad-

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vancing years. Monkeys entertaining ideas of their own in the matter, the mating problem was not always solved by the simple acquisition of a female. One male at the Nchanga mine killed two prospective mates before he settled down happily with a third.

There was another thing we all found it well to remember even with the best-natured monkey—that it shared the average practical joker's inability to take a joke. Wiry strength, lightning speed and a businesslike set of teeth made the retaliation of even a small member of the species a fairly serious business.

Russ Parker, the Manager of Chambishi, came over for a visit to the Irwins one day before my marriage. When we went out after lunch to see him off we found that Dave Junior's little river monkey, Jack, had made one of his periodic jail-breaks from his box and chain and was absorbed in a minute inspection of the interior of Russ's sedan. Russ quietly ran the windows up, and then laughed heartily at Jack's baffled surprise when he found he could not get through the glass.

Jack's attempts to leave the car were shortly transmuted into an infuriated desire to get at Russ, with the obvious hope of committing some peculiarly unpleasant form of mayhem. Russ had to go inside the house before Dave Junior could do anything with the raging, shrilly cursing animal; two years later a glimpse of Russ in the distance was enough to send Jack into a similar spasm of insane fury. The monkey, like the elephant, does not forget.

Fear could make a pet monkey as dangerous as did its wrath. My own lesson along this line brought to light another, and a very curious, fact about monkeys.

A Lamba boy came to our house one afternoon selling curios.

## Home Zoo

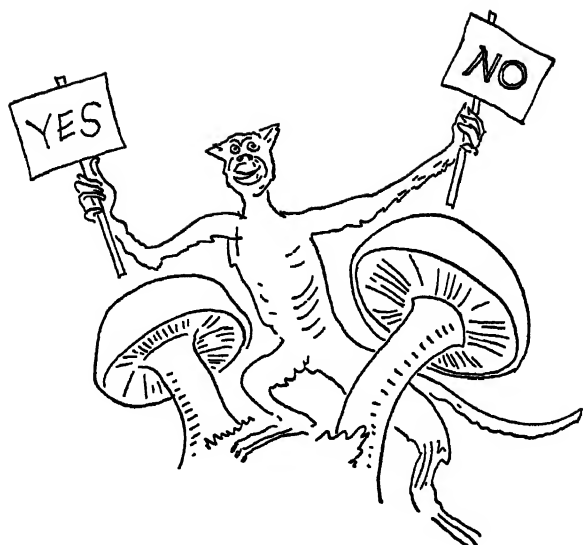
I selected from his stock a leopard that he had carved from a piece of white wood. It was about ten inches long. Crudely conceived and executed, its charm lay in the quizzical expression on the face and the peculiar angle at which the tail stuck out behind. The boy's assertion of its identity was only confirmed by the dark spots he had burned all over it with a hot tool.

After the pedlar's departure I walked over to see Cicero with my purchase still under my arm. When I moved it so that he got a good look at it he went into a dreadful convulsion of terror, in the course of which he tore my arm from shoulder to wrist, foamed at the mouth, all but cut himself in half with his chain, and finally had to be brought out of a faint with smelling salts.

I did not know at the time that monkeys had a hereditary fear of leopards, and after I was enlightened I found it incredible that the tiny, scentless carving should actually have suggested the real thing to Cicero. But a few experiments on other monkeys, carried out cautiously and at long range, convinced me. The spots alone were apparently enough. A small rubber snake, as sketchy in its resemblance to its model as the leopard, produced precisely the same effect.

Our two monkeys made themselves useful to us in a rather odd way. I have always been partial to mushrooms and stood goggle-eyed and enraptured, if somewhat alarmed, before the gigantic specimens in the bush, some of which measured two and three feet across.

Someone assured me that, though monkeys liked mushrooms, they would always instinctively reject a poisonous growth. After taking the precaution of checking a few times with a treatise



on mushrooms, I abandoned the volume altogether and trusted entirely to Jack's reactions. Cicero and Socrates later proved equally reliable. I found it best, however, always to have another morsel of food handy, so that diplomatic relations might be restored promptly if the mushroom proved inedible.

Some of the pets from the bush were rather more bizarre than attractive. Prominent in this category was Peter, the turkey buzzard. Peter's owner had found the young bird on the ground, where it had apparently been abandoned by its parents. A soft Irish heart had prompted Mr. O'Brien to bring the hideous little creature home, where it flourished on an amazing daily consumption of raw meat. Peter's ultimate development of feminine characteristics was a discrepancy which often resulted from the too early christening of creatures brought in from the wilds.

If not viewed too closely, a full-grown Rhodesian turkey



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buzzard is a rather handsome bird. Somewhat larger in body than a domestic turkey, it has glossy black feathers, a magnificent spread of wing and tail, and wattles of a vivid scarlet. Its vulture-like head and beak detract from its charm at close range.

The adolescent Peter might have emanated from a diseased surrealist imagination. Her tail feathers took months to sprout, which meanwhile made her look absurdly overbalanced by her long neck, with its disorderly crop of pin feathers, and her enormous beak. She made no attempt to fly for some time, but ran about with an awkward, waddling motion, wings slightly spread and dragging clumsily along the ground.

In such a grotesque ensemble her one beauty was startling—she had a set of long, curly eyelashes that would have been the envy of Hollywood. The coy use she made of these, considered in conjunction with her decided preference for masculine society, might have struck a warning note as to her sex while she was still very young.

Douglas, for whom Peter developed a violent attachment after he rashly tickled her chin one day, suffered severely from her subsequent attentions, as did I, too, vicariously. To reach the golf course, we had to pass Mr. O'Brien's house. Peter, uttering loud, raucous honks of pleasure, always joined us to follow Douglas affectionately around the course. Her honks were evidently intended as coos, but neither her larynx nor beak were adjusted to the production of the latter sound.

Anthills looming in every direction, greens made of slag, fairways that were like the average rough, roughs full of waist-high grass, and piccannins who whistled, sang and chatted with each other as they did what they optimistically regarded as caddying, made golf a difficult game to play at best on the

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Roan course as it existed in those days. Peter's intermittent honking added the final straw as far as our personal efforts were concerned. No amount of shooing discouraged the infatuated bird, and, as neither of us liked to resort to actual murder we simply had to give up golf for the remainder of the current season. By the time the next rains were over Peter had fortunately been tickled on the chin by a wild member of her own kind and had flown off into the bush.

A young Englishman at the mine once wrote home to his mother telling her that he had just acquired a bush baby, but neglecting to add any helpful descriptive details. His shocked parent, by return mail, urged his immediate return from a country which was plainly having a loosening effect on his morals.

Instead of a scandal, however, a bush baby is a galago, a primate related to the Madagascan lemur and to the monkey. It comes in larger sizes elsewhere in Africa; the copperfields type just fits comfortably in the palm of a human hand. The bushy tail is about two inches longer than the tiny, light body, which is given a plump appearance by a thick covering of soft, mouse-grey fur.

In shape the bush baby is rather like a cross between a kangaroo and a squirrel, tremendously elongated hind legs enabling it to execute amazing leaps through the treetops. Two very long toes give its hind foot a lopsided formation, but the hairless front paws are ridiculously like human hands, even to perfectly defined fingernails. The thumb is set opposite the fingers and is used as we use ours—an unusual dexterity in an animal, not shared even by monkeys. Its ground gait is a kangaroo-like hop; at rest it sits upright on its small haunches, holding and biting its food as we eat a sandwich.

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The bush baby's round head ends in an abruptly pointed nose. Its inordinately large ears are round, quite naked and as thin as tissue paper, with the feel and flexibility of soft, rubberized silk. When the animal is awake the ears are never still; they twitch, quiver and turn incessantly, like a pair of delicate antennæ. It sleeps curled up in a compact ball with its tail wrapped tightly around it, its ears rolled up neatly like two small furled flags close to its head.

Round eyes, as large, proportionately, as the ears and accentuated further by dark encircling rings endow the bush baby with a facial expression of perpetual, sad astonishment, which contrasts oddly with its gay, amusing ways. All pupil, they are the dark, deeply luminous eyes of the nocturnal creature. In the daytime they give a queer, unfocussed effect—or rather an effect of being focussed on something infinitely far away.

For some time after I reached the Roan the only glimpse I had of a bush baby were those two red eyes shining eerily out of a tree at night. They looked enormous illuminated by the headlights of the car, so enormous that I was convinced that the first few pair I saw belonged to a lion. The thought of what a lion might be doing up in the small top twigs of a tree occurred only after the initial thrill had somewhat subsided.

Bush babies were said to take kindly to domesticity and to make delightful pets, and it was not long before I conceived the brilliant idea of catching one. Douglas and I were as yet unmarried, so when I confided my ambition to him he readily agreed to help me, though he knew perfectly well that our chances of success were negligible.

At any rate, we went out night after night armed with a flashlight, a covered basket, and, on my part at least, unlimited

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optimism. Our simple procedure was to drive slowly along until a pair of twin red points glowed from a tree beside the road. Then we stopped the car and got out with the flashlight. I held it trained on the bush baby from the ground while Douglas shinned up the tree.

Our quarry's equally simple but far more effective procedure was to wait until Douglas was well up and then leap to another tree. Twenty feet was easy for it; it could, when pushed, do considerably better. I gradually became convinced that we were on the wildest of wild-goose chases and that we would always, at our most agile, remain a jump behind a bush baby.

To my pleased surprise a friend at Mufulira gave us a pair for a wedding present. Taken from their nests as infants, they had known no life but a domestic one and were perfectly happy in captivity. They made even more enchanting pets than I had hoped, displaying an amount of personality amazing in creatures of such minute size. Gaiety, independence and affection were combined with a courage that might, like their eyes, more suitably have belonged to a lion. A poignant commentary on the latter quality is the fact that natives robbing a nest must always kill the mother, who literally fights to the death to defend her young.

Thorough screening made it possible for us to give the bush babies the run of the house. Ignoring the elaborate basket I fixed for them, they spent their days slumbering on a high shelf in the back hall. Nights they devoted to careening from room to room, largely between points on the picture moulding. At close range their agility was even more impressive than it had been out of doors. I have often seen one leaping across a room catch a fly in its hand in midair.

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They attended at once on the Roan to altering the names their former owner had given them. Our first party turned out to be their christening, though we had planned it as a house-warming. It was to take the form of a large sundowner; in the excitement of preparing for it we forgot all about the bush babies, tucked innocently away on their shelf.

By half past six on the appointed day the party had made a good start. Douglas was pouring drinks at a side table and conversation was rising rapidly to the usual sundowner pitch. The door to the back of the house was open as the boys passed to and fro with sandwiches and hors d'œuvres.

Suddenly two small grey objects hurtled through the door. The bush babies had come to the party and that they were in party mood there was no doubt. First they executed above our heads a series of plain and fancy leaps back and forth across the room. Then one of them leaped from the picture moulding to the neck of a bottle on the table. So lightly did it land that the bottle never even rocked. Simultaneously, the other leaped to the shoulder of a feminine guest. Unlike the bottle, she rocked violently and screamed. The bush baby, disconcerted, returned to the picture moulding. After a few moments of thought it joined its mate on the table, where it, too, clung fondly to the neck of a bottle.

'I believe the little beggars want a drink!' exclaimed one of the men. He held out his glass of whisky and soda. Abandoning the corked bottles the pair lapped from it with enthusiasm.

From that point on it was the bush babies' sundowner. They accepted drinks from every glass, mixing gin, whisky, sherry and beer with reckless abandon. Between drinks they bounded hilariously about, from picture moulding to guest, from guest

to bottle, from bottle back to picture moulding. By dinner time their condition could only be described as plastered and they eventually passed out cold on the diningroom sideboard.

Their names, at least locally, were settled for all time. The Roan community knew them as Haig & Haig.

They became, in a reverse fashion, the toasts of the countryside. As 'when' was missing from their bright lexicon and we naturally did not wish to see them end in a drunkard's grave, we had to set a limit to the number of drinks that might be offered them. Their reaction to the clink of glass against bottle was that of the war horse to the bugle note. We knew by this time that the taste was inherited—that wild bush babies often caroused on the wine that forms in hollow palm trees.

Born exhibitionists, the Haigs' social accomplishments were not limited to drinking. Mr. Haig hung by his toes from the picture moulding, twisted his head around and ogled visitors coyly over his shoulder. Mrs. Haig (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say 'Miss,' as she consistently spurned Mr. Haig's amorous advances) sat up on her haunches, stretched an arm in the air and plainly invited admirers to tickle her small armpit. During the tickling she closed her eyes and chirped ecstatically. Held by the tip of her tail she swung to and fro for a while, and then climbed briskly up the tail, hand over hand. Both had a large repertoire of gymnastic stunts, executed on the back of a chair or an outstretched finger.

Next to showing off for company, the Haigs' favourite indoor sport was riding my hand as I brushed my hair. Obviously considering the rite as conducted for their especial benefit, they scrambled nightly for the strategic position on my fingers, to which they liked to cling during the ride.

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The pair put in a good deal of time teasing Mama, the cat, who regarded them for a time as an exotic form of mouse, and stalked them industriously. Afraid at first that she might catch them, we soon perceived that her chances of doing so were little better than ours had been when we pursued their wild relatives through the bush. To do Mama justice, she took far less time than I had to realize the futility of the chase and maintained her dignity thereafter by ignoring them.

Bill, the Great Dane, on the other hand, took a passionate interest in the bush babies. Unable to get anywhere near them, he never lost hope. Whenever they leaped into the room Bill's head jerked up as if someone had pulled a string. Fixing his eyes firmly on one of them as it clung to the picture moulding, he walked over and put his forelegs up on the wall below it. The bush baby flashed away too swiftly for Bill to follow its movement, achieving, from his point of view, an inexplicable invisibility. He always remained for some time gazing at the empty spot on the moulding with a puzzled, anxious frown on his forehead. The vigil ended when he suddenly looked round at us in acute embarrassment and trotted sheepishly from the room.

Like their monkey cousins the bush babies bitterly resented ridicule, as a house boy we once employed briefly discovered to his sorrow. In spite of our repeated admonitions, Millik persisted in teasing Mr. Haig, until the latter turned on him one day with a ferocity as shocking as it was incongruous in so small a creature. Millik afterwards did his best to make peace. His efforts, however, were futile; Mr. Haig never forgave him, but continued to pursue him about the house like a relentless fate.

Preliminary to attacking, Mr. Haig reared on his hind legs,

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teeth bared and ears laid back, and squared off with his hands in a manner absurdly like a boxer, emitting meanwhile a loud, piercingly shrill whistle. From this menacing stance he flew at Millik's hand, sunk his sharply pointed teeth in and leaped away before the poor lad, quite paralyzed with fright anyway, could move out of range. To give Millik a chance to do his work, we tried putting Mr. Haig in a cupboard. This only increased the animal's annoyance, and Millik decided after a little that he had better quit our establishment.

By no means all the copperfields pets were wild. Almost everyone had a dog, a fact that inspired the organization of the Roan Hunt Club. Few of the dogs would have been eligible for show purposes, for a highly bred animal was more subject than a mongrel to tropical disorders, notably a severe intestinal affliction known as biliary. There was, during my time, no professional veterinarian in the district.

The Rhodesian ridgeback, or lion dog, was popular. A proper breed is being developed with this animal; as it appeared in the copperfields when I was there it usually looked like a mixture of a little Dane with a good deal of mongrel. Its distinguishing characteristic was the peculiar backward growth of the hair along its spine.

When the Hunt Club was organized the sole requirement for membership was possession of a dog. The few meets that took place were lively affairs. The pack consisted of three Alsations, a half dozen ridgebacks, an airedale, three or four cockers, a bulldog, a wire-haired, four fox terriers and a dozen miscellaneous animals. A hound of any description was conspicuous by its complete absence. In a similar absence of horses followers of the hunt proceeded on foot.



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'Followers' is purely a metaphorical term as used here. Two or three meets ended abruptly at their starting point when it was found impossible to imbue the motley canine gathering with the proper co-operative spirit. The assembled dogs were convinced each time that Armageddon had arrived and behaved accordingly. Then came the day on which they confused the scent of the drag with that of a native boy carrying some raw meat home from the butcher shop and treed the unfortunate lad in a thorn bush. After this harrowing episode the Hunt Club hunted no more.

Largely due to Mama's heroic efforts, practically every family in the district had at least one cat. Mama, whose name derived from her endless production of progeny, was really only half domestic. Her maternal parent was a large black Persian; her sire, we are convinced, a denizen of the bush. Ignoring all inheritance from her mother, she fitted in every detail the scientific description of one of the small African wildcats—miniature size, tiny feet with black pads, black nose, round head, wide face, magnificent whiskers, short stubby ears and thick, short dark grey fur with distinctive tiger markings in black.

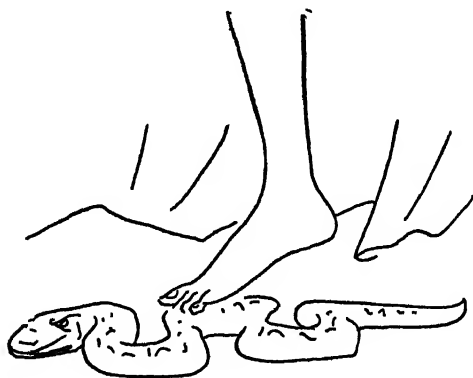
Her behaviour was as distinctive as her appearance. She answered to a whistle instead of the ordinary cat-allurement noises; she invariably took the initiative in her innumerable affairs of the heart, usually pursuing her chosen mate round and round a large anthill; she allowed no strange dog or cat to enter our house, though she complacently watched Bill, who adored any tiny creature, pick up a newly born kitten and walk proudly about with only its tail sticking out of his enormous mouth. She played very infrequently, never sheathing her formidable claws when she did so. By a lashing tail she expressed pleasure

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instead of anger; the growl with which she did announce the latter emotion was one of the most sinister sounds I have ever heard.

She disliked small children intensely and exhibited a snobbish attitude toward the boys, from whom she never accepted food or familiarity of any sort. Matches was the sole exception to this rule, a fact which he attributed to his membership in his tribe's Wildcat totem. Mama's taste in food was exotic, her favourite articles of diet being canned asparagus, raw tomatoes, and fruit.

I occasionally found her devotion somewhat overpowering. I have put her off my lap a hundred times, by accurate count, giving up at that point and letting her stay, since it was only too plain that at three hundred she would still be coming back. She slept, with equal persistence, on the promontory formed by my hip as I lay in bed at night, shifting expertly to maintain her balance whenever I turned over. It was not necessary for her to wake up to do this. She never ate a rat or mouse, but always placed the corpse carefully on the floor by my bed, where I was almost sure to step on it; on two occasions I derived a nasty shock from placing my bare foot on a slaughtered snake.



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She never failed to have her kittens on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday, when we were home from work. Our friends are inclined to be sceptical about her ability to arrange this, but it is odd that in five years devoted to bearing kittens as frequently as it is biologically possible for a cat to do so she never once had them at another time.

Matches took Mama's control of her delivery dates as a matter of course.

'Ikona, Mama—lo push waiting to Sat'day,' he told me reprovingly when I once thought the routine was going to be varied and prepared the basket on Wednesday for a birth that seemed momentarily imminent.

If I stroked her she always purred throughout the ordeal—her loud, raucous purr that could be heard in every room in the house.

After the kittens had arrived Mama's attitude toward them was casual; it was plainly no maternal instinct by which she was so powerfully animated. When over-production made it impossible to find a home for even one survivor we resorted to drowning all the kittens at birth. Mama suffered no ill effects, either physical or emotional. After a desultory search of the premises, conducted with the air of one who attends to a necessary but uninteresting duty, she dismissed the old litter from her mind and turned her attention briskly toward the creation of a new. That night there was always a great commotion around some nearby anthill; for it was as easy to keep Mama in the house at such a time as it would have been to pick up a drop of quicksilver.

Once Mama developed a cyst in her ear and we took her over to the hospital for an operation. Coming out of the chloro-

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form too soon, she scratched the unfortunate doctor's arm to ribbons before I could reach her. But when I held her she allowed him to finish his work with no anæsthetic and without making a sound or movement.

When we came away from Rhodesia we had most of our remaining pets put away, because we wanted to make sure that the life of none of them should be marred by a miserable ending. I dreaded the destruction of Mama more than any of the others, for I had twice seen her struggle fiercely against the administration of chloroform. This time she lay down quite quietly in the big bell jar and went to sleep. . . . Mama was an animal who had always made her own decisions and we think she knew and made one then.

In the Happy Hunting Ground to which her doughty small ghost has gone it is my hope that she has found plenty of ant-hills. And a hand to stroke her when the inevitable weekend comes round.



## *Chiwali the Third*

HOLIDAYS PRESENTED a yearly problem in the copperfields. The Cape and Natal coasts afforded beautiful resorts and beaches, but involved a serious loss of time in the long railway journey, to say nothing of expensive fare. Douglas and I felt, in any case, that resorts were much the same the world over, whereas Northern Rhodesia itself was full of features that could not be duplicated anywhere.

A local camping trip had the advantage of easy adaptation to any pocketbook. It could be elaborate and de luxe, with guides, porters, tents, beds, rugs, tables, chairs, gramophone, hampers of food, cases of drink, and processions of lorries. It could, on the other hand, be cut down to the equipment that could be stowed in the rear and on the running boards of one lone car. The latter programme was the one we usually followed, with the particular objective of seeing something of native life in an environment more native than the company compound offered, and obtaining photographs.

When Chirupula Stephenson asked us to accompany him

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on a holiday visit to Chiwali the Third, paramount chief of the Lala tribe, we accepted with more than alacrity. The royal Lala village, said Chirupula, was far out in the bush and would afford us an excellent view of typical Northern Rhodesian tribesmen living much as their ancestors for generations past had lived. Under Chirupula's guidance we knew that we would not only be able to see, but to gain some understanding of what we saw.

Beginning our education at once, Chirupula told us that the Lala nation, about a hundred and twenty thousand strong, was divided into three main branches designated by the names of three sisters from whom it originally sprung. These were Mushiri, Ngosa, and Mwewa, who had doubtless come from across the Luapula River three or four hundred years ago as part of the great movement of the Bantu race which has been in progress for some ten centuries. The Bantu race, of course, includes all those African tribes whose speech has a common basic origin.

A paramount chief ruled each main branch of the Lala nation; under him existed an intricate network of chiefs, lesser chiefs, and sub-chiefs. Chieftainship was inherited, Chiwali the Third being the ninth of his dynasty to rule the Mushiri branch.

About a week before we were to meet Chirupula at Kapiri M'poshi he sent a runner out from his farm, Chiwefwe, to apprise Chiwali of our impending arrival. No chief, Chirupula explained, is at his best when startled; it would never do to take an important eighty-five-year-old monarch by surprise. Chiwali's village lay some hundred miles by dirt road from the farm; somewhat less by the direct route the runner would take. He would cover the distance in about two days, affording Chiwali

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ample time to accustom himself to the idea of our visit and thus enabling him to greet us with undisturbed poise.

At Kapiri a week later we packed our joint equipment on Chirupula's big lorry, leaving our car at the hotel. Beside Chirupula and ourselves the party consisted of half a dozen boys from Chiwefwe who were to do our cooking, bed-making and so on. Their presence, and the folding table and chairs also contributed by Chirupula, lent the expedition a touch of elegance that our former ones had lacked.

The road to Chiwali's relapsed after a while to the status of native footpath, allowing us to make only seventy-five miles the first day. We camped that night close to a small, anonymous Lala village.

We had the doubtful privilege of reaching this village in company with a thick swarm of Egyptian locusts—a swarm large enough to darken the sun as it flew over and around us. Thousands of beating wings in action together produced a peculiar, dry rattle that could be heard distinctly through the roar of the lorry's motor.

As one who has, irrationally or not, always regarded flying insects as a definite menace, I derived a good deal of comfort from that afternoon's encounter with the locusts. I had never been caught in a low-flying swarm before and had dreaded the experience because I had pictured the giant insects as beating against me and lighting on me incessantly. Scarcely one of them, however, touched either us or the lorry; they seemed quite as anxious as I was to avoid the contact. Caught later on in a similar situation, I was always able to maintain a reasonable amount of poise, though I never forgot to keep moving.

Ordinarily our advent would have created a sensation in such

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a tiny, isolated village as the one we reached at sundown. We were scarcely noticed, however, in the presence of the locusts, which rate high as a table delicacy in Africa. Uttering glad cries, the villagers bounded off in pursuit of the swarm; nor did they return until they had made sure it was settling for the night on trees in the immediate vicinity.

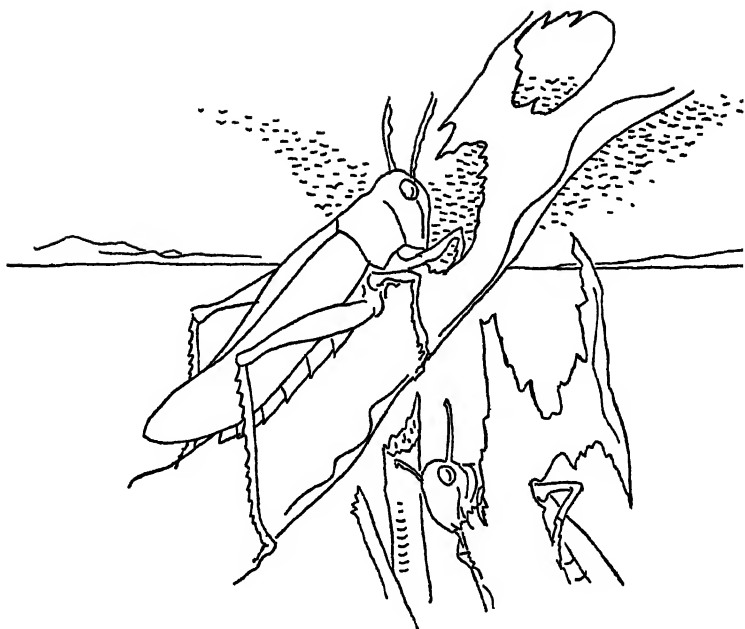
Chirupula said that if we wanted to see a locust crop gathered we must get up early next morning as the insects would have to be caught while the night's chill still held them paralyzed.

We accordingly rose at daybreak to find the whole village out before us, carrying baskets, gourds, clay pots—anything in the nature of a receptacle upon which hands could be laid. One man simply brought an axe. With this he proceeded quickly to chop down a tree and skin off a section of bark about three feet long. With one end stopped up the bark tube made a fine deep receptacle.

The advance of the villagers upon the swarm was businesslike. Into their containers they shook the inert insects by thousands from trees, bushes, and grass. A number of trees too large to be shaken were summarily cut down. Full containers were taken immediately to the village where other villagers waited. The waiting contingent removed the head, legs, and wings of each locust with quick, deft twists that were reminiscent of the gestures used in preparing string beans for the pot. The stripped bodies were tossed on to grass mats and left to dry in the sun before being eaten.

Leaving the scene of these rather repulsive activities we went on our way right after breakfast, reaching Chiwali's village about noon. As the residence of a paramount chief it was a good deal larger than the average native community in north-





west Northern Rhodesia. About a hundred huts housed from four to five hundred people.

With no locusts to dim our glory we were given a rousing welcome by Chiwali's local subjects. A big crowd ran down the path to meet us and, after kneeling briefly in the usual respectful greeting to Chirupula, escorted us back to the village with a great deal of singing, shouting, and clapping of hands. The crowd contrasted in appearance with any to be seen in the copperfields; a European garment was the exception here rather than the rule. Almost everyone wore only a loincloth or used a strip of calico as a somewhat larger wrapping.

As soon as we had alighted Chirupula quieted the tumult with a raised hand. Singling out a young man from the village

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crowd he asked that we be shown the way to the chief's hut. Chirupula had been to the village many times before and was perfectly well aware of the location of the edifice in question. But he also knew that any well-bred visitor in Lalaland must be shown his host's residence, particularly when the host in question is a paramount chief.

We accordingly followed our guide to the largest hut, around which all the others were irregularly grouped; three of our own party brought up the rear with our camp chairs. Arrived at the hut, we seated ourselves in a row outside while our guide went in to announce us.

After a few minutes' interval there emerged from the hut a thin black man, so tall that he had to bend almost double to come out of the low doorway, so old that his woolly hair was grey. This was Chiwali the Third, paramount chief of the Balala.

I think we would have known it even if we had come upon him quite casually, and in spite of his entirely undistinguished costume. He wore, as Northern Rhodesian chiefs often do, an old army overcoat, under which a single piece of dark blue calico wrapped about his loins hung to his ankles like a skirt. But he was, obviously, an aristocrat. His royal blood was immediately apparent in an immense dignity of bearing, in a pair of high cheekbones, and in remarkably long and sensitive hands. It subsequently showed in the natural, unstudied courtesy that marked his manners as a host.

Chiwali's amazing vitality showed in his upright carriage and in the fact that he was, at the ripe old age of eighty-five, the father of an eighteen-months-old baby. Investigating this interesting phase of his personality when we had come to know him better, we once got Chiwali to count up for us as many of

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his children as he could remember by name. He reached, eventually, a total of forty-five, being assisted in the enumeration by a collection of descendants who in themselves constituted a large proportion of the village population.

At the end of the count Chiwali leaned back in his chair, staring absently into space. His face had suddenly fallen into sombre lines. The faces of his children and grandchildren reflected the look, as if the same sobering thought had touched every mind in the company at once.

'I am old now,' said Chiwali presently with a slow, regretful shake of his head, 'and no longer strong.' He might have been speaking to himself, but all the other heads around him shook slowly too, in grave, sympathetic assent.

There was another pause, at the end of which a bright, reminiscent gleam shot into the chief's eyes.

'But when I was young—that was a different matter.' His voice had grown brisk now, he straightened in his chair to tap his lean chest briefly with his thin fingers. 'When I was young,' said Chiwali, 'I was a *man*.'

The collective issue of his loins, who had brightened with him, laughed delightedly. Every head nodded in energetic and admiring approval of the statement.

'He was a *man*, my father!'

'My father was truly a *man*!'

'Was my father not a *man*?'

The triumphant refrain seemed to ring for several minutes after its last echo had died.

'... a *man*! ... a *man*! ... a *man*!'

On the day of our arrival Chiwali was followed from his hut by our former guide, who brought out a rush-bottomed kitchen

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chair which proved to be the sole piece of European furniture in the village. On this Chiwali seated himself for the period of polite silence which indicates mutual appreciation of each other's importance on the part of host and guest. When he finally announced that Chirupula was seen and had been assured of his own visibility, Douglas and I were introduced and exchanged handclaps and 'mutende's' with Chiwali—'mutende' being a word used by most Northern Rhodesian tribes to express greetings, thanks, approval, encouragement, cordiality, in fact all of the more social emotions.

Chiwali let us know presently that some new huts were being built about a hundred yards from the main body of the village and asked us to make use of as many of them as we liked during our stay. An elaborate exchange of thanks followed, ours for the huts, Chiwali's for the honour of our visit. Courtesies were concluded with another clapping of hands, after which we retired to establish ourselves.

As we sat at our sundowners outside our dining hut late that afternoon we perceived the approach from the village of a long procession moving in single file. The line of marchers was led by Chiwali; behind him walked two ancient women. These, Chirupula told us, were the chief's sisters, Munsele and Wangwa. The young men who came next were sons of the sisters; last of all came Chiwali's own sons.

This apparent discrepancy in the order of precedence derived from the matrilineal character of the Lala tribe. The line of descent in such a tribe is traced through the woman rather than the man. At Chiwali's death the succeeding chief was to be chosen from among the sons of one of the sisters—preferably from among those of the elder—rather than from among Chi-

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wali's sons. The sisters and their sons were therefore queens and princes of the tribe, while Chiwali's wives and sons did not even rank as royalty, though they, of course, took precedence over ordinary tribesmen.

The procession had come to give us our formal welcome to the village. Our previous meeting with Chiwali was tacitly ignored by all concerned and we were presented to him all over again.

A grass mat was now placed on the ground in front of us. On this Chiwali and his sisters seated themselves in the cross-legged position that shortly produces severe cramp in European muscles, but which the most aged African assumes with ease and maintains indefinitely.

Munsele and Wangwa ranged themselves slightly behind Chiwali, Munsele on the west, Wangwa on the east. In speaking of death, the Balala use the term 'to go west,' for it is in the west that Mbonshi, the Land of Spirits, lies. Munsele, as the elder, was presumably nearer to going west than was Wangwa and consequently always sat on that side. The sons ranged themselves in neat rows behind, carefully graded according to rank.

Three fowls with tied legs, a bowl of rice, and a basket of mealie meal were now placed on the ground before us. From the speech with which Chiwali accompanied their presentation we learned that these were not only tokens of welcome, but were something in the nature of bread cast upon the waters. He did not say in so many crude words that his offerings would be dwarfed by the handsome gifts we would make him before we left, but the idea was nevertheless conveyed with admirable precision and force.

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The climax of the occasion was reached when a large object which had been carried by one of Chiwali's attendants was brought forward. It proved to be a xylophone of original design. Two reeds were attached to the sides of a big, hollowed-out *kalabash*, or gourd. From the up-curved ends of the reeds a flat board was suspended so as to hang just over a hole in the top of the *kalabash*.

Clasping the *kalabash* with one arm, Chiwali beat on the board with a stick, the end of which was wrapped in a piece of raw native rubber. The sound produced was low, monotonous, yet curiously sweet. Thus accompanied, Chiwali stood before us and sang. The impromptu words of his song were descriptive of Chirupula's known virtues and our own pleasing appearance. The old chief's voice had surprising resonance; its occasional quaver only added to the charm of the performance. Like most African tunes this one started at no beginning, came to no end; it simply broke off when the singer had finished with what he had to say.

The village did not settle down right away to its usual routine, though we lost no time in beginning to look hopefully about for a chance to observe its customs. The villagers unfortunately displayed a similar tendency to observe ours, particularly my own performance on the typewriter, which evidently fell, in their estimation, into the category of high-class vaudeville.

In a few days, however, even typing lost its novelty and life around us began to assume a perceptible pattern, the first feature of which that struck us being the curious division of communal labour between the sexes. The division had evidently not been made with the idea of sparing women the hardest physical

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exertion; in quantity they performed a great many more tasks than did the men. The use of the hoe as the Lala symbol of femininity and the axe as the masculine token may well be based on the far greater frequency with which the former implement has to be put into use.

In building the new huts we observed that men cut the trees, made logs, and placed them in the ground in an upright circle for the structure's stockade-like frame. Women then spaded up an area of earth, poured water on it, and mixed it thoroughly with their feet. The resulting mud they carried into the hut to



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plaster the chinks between the logs. Women cut grass and brought it in on their heads in great bundles, after which the men finished the work by thatching the roof.

Lala men clear the ground of trees where planting is to be done; women do the planting and subsequently hoe and help harvest the crops. Women grind or pound grain into meal, fetch water from the river for general village use, and of course do all the cooking and the attending to the children. The mother of a small infant always carries it tied to her back, no matter how heavy the task she is performing.

In the crafts men weave baskets and mats, make bark cloth, forge the iron heads for implements, and do wood carving. Women make the clay pots and bowls for household use.

This condensed account of the work in Chiwal's village probably makes it sound far more strenuous than it actually was. No worker ever hurried about a task. If a mat or a piece of bark cloth or a new hut wasn't finished this week it was no matter—there wasn't any real difference between this week and next, or even next month. The pounding of grain, the stirring of a pot of mealie meal, the chopping of a tree, all went on to the beat of Africa's pulse—a slow, swinging beat that marks the passage of time in terms of eternity. One saw here in the little bush village how the European's constant cry of 'checha!' must fall with bewildering effect on African ears.

Periods of labour were alternated every day with long periods of rest. The men of the community found hours to devote to *chisolo*, an intricate game of Arab origin in which a handful of stones are moved interminably about a series of small holes scraped in the ground. There was always time for a large group of villagers to gather around us as we sat at noon every day,



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and again in the evening, in the shade of a tree near the royal hut to talk over with Chiwali the things we had seen.

Chiwali, incidentally, had arranged at once for me to do my personal observing of village custom in solid comfort. To this end he delegated one of his subjects to accompany me everywhere with my camp chair. The chair was of the collapsible, 'officers' mess' variety. A single long piece of canvas formed the seat and the upright back, the framework being composed of a dozen or more round sticks which were permanently attached here and there to the canvas, but had to be fitted together by inserting the ends of certain sticks into holes bored in others.

Both my chair carrier and I had rather a bad time of it with this ingenious but highly complicated piece of camp gear. He was assiduous in pursuit of his duty—so assiduous, in fact, that if in walking from point to point in the village I so much as paused momentarily he took it for a sign that I had grown tired and wished to sit down. He thereupon thrust the chair vigorously at the back of my legs, often causing those members to collapse abruptly at the knee.

The chair, true to one of its functions, frequently collapsed too, occasionally depositing me on the ground with a sound thud and always producing acute agony of mind in its guardian, who spent the following half-hour coping with the not inconsiderable problem involved in its reconstruction. One of our most treasured photographs taken in Lalaland depicts an unhappy tribesman wrestling hopelessly but valiantly with yards of dismembered chair. To such close grips did he sometimes come with canvas and sticks that I feared he might in the end find himself a permanent part of the rebuilt structure.

With Chirupula to throw light on the more obscure points,

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we learned a great deal about Lala tradition and custom in our talks with Chiwali and his people. The significance of the lip ring worn by most of the women was explained to us first.

While it is purely ornamental now, its original use had been to disfigure a girl so that Arab slave-traders would pass her by in their search for fine physical specimens. The ring is carved from a piece of *kalabash* or in ivory. Shaped like a collar button it fits into a vertical slit cut through the upper lip.

Chiwali then enlarged a little upon what we had already heard about the three creators, Kashindika, Luchere, and Shingo, who had fashioned the world from materials furnished by Lesa, the Almighty. Lesa, as usual, was always indicated as He Whose Name Is Not Spoken, or simply by a pause in speech and a slight upward movement of the speaker's hand.

Whenever Luchere was mentioned we were interested to observe the small but unmistakable shading in tone used by Chiwali and the brief gesture executed each time by every native member of his audience. The gesture was only the suggestion of a handclap, no one ever glanced directly at Chirupula as it was done; but its omission at mention of either Kashindika or Shingo was significant and it brought vividly to mind again the picture of a young Englishman with red hair arriving thirty years ago in Lalaland, fast on the heels of a witchdoctor's prophecy.

The three creators, Chiwali told us, fell one day to wondering how far it might be from the west to the east. This brought up another, related, matter for speculation: did only one sun cross the sky every day or was there, perhaps, a procession of suns? And what became of the great fiery ball after it had disappeared from sight at night? Did it actually fall into a hole to the west

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of the Smoke that Thunders and make its way back to the east by a secret, underground route?

'Let us travel,' suggested Luchere, at length, 'and find out all these things.'

The other two agreed and the trio set forth together. They walked for days, for weeks, and at last for months, but still they did not come to the east, nor did they come any nearer to solving their problems about the sun, which of course belonged to Lesa, the Almighty, and had been there before their own turn at creation had come. After a while Kashindika, the eldest, grew tired and said to Luchere:

'It is a longer way from the west to the east than I thought it would be. I am able to go on no farther and will accordingly return to the west. When you have learned the distance, come back and tell me. In the meantime let us divide the world up fairly between us. The country to the east will be yours and all the elephants that die looking to the east will be yours. The country to the west and all the elephants that face the west to die will be mine, since every elephant, like every dog, knows without mistake who is its master.'

In Luchere's agreement to his brother's proposal it was interesting to perceive a direct basis for one of Africa's oldest traditions, once shared by a great many tribes—that ivory belonged to the chief in whose land it was found.

Shingo, the youngest brother, had been loitering behind all this time, but he came up now and was very much displeased to hear of the arrangement the other two had just made.

'How is this?' he cried. 'Am I not also a creator? Is there not a share of the world equal to yours that should be mine?'

There was an uncomfortable silence, during which Kashin-

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dika and Luchere stared at each other with puzzled frowns. It was quite true that they had momentarily forgotten all about Shingo, and now that they were reminded they saw that they were faced by a very awkward difficulty. Dividing anything in half was a simple matter, especially the world, which was made up of east and west anyway, but splitting it three ways—! It wasn't at all easy to see how that could possibly be done.

A good deal of thought produced no solution of the problem and Shingo finally lost his last shred of patience.

'Very well,' he said angrily, 'it shall be as you say. You shall have all the land and all the ivory between you and I will take care of myself. I will do this by turning into a lion so that I may go everywhere. The whole world, both east and west, will be my hunting ground; everyone I meet, man and beast, will be my prey. I will take my ivory, or anything else that I want, where I find it.'

With these words Shingo in turn created tradition, for a deceased Lala chief often follows the example he set by returning to earth in the form of a lion, a habit which makes things very embarrassing at times for Lala hunters. To slay a lion is each man's proudest ambition; yet the act always involves the possibility of incurring the deadly wrath of a reincarnated chief, or even of the god Shingo himself.

Chiwali called our attention to how the enmity promised by Shingo is commemorated in the Lala name for a lion. It is 'Nsukusamende Sombikaluwulaantu,' and means, 'I never bathe my teeth in water—only in living blood.'

Pursuing the subject of lions a little further we learned that the beast is the inspiration for the most deadly Lala muti—medicine. To produce this a witchdoctor makes up a small

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bundle composed of a fragment of lion scrotum, a tooth, a claw, two *impingu*, or small wooden pegs bound together by a cord from the whiskers of a lion, and a leaf from the *kasabwa* tree. The *impingu* represent the lion's bony structure, the whisker hair is chosen as coming from near the brain, and therefore stands for intelligence. As the first to put out its new leaves, *kasabwa* announces, as plainly as if it actually spoke, the coming of spring; its leaf consequently figures in the medicine as a tongue.

The whole compound, comprising the essentials of a destroyer—tooth, claw, tongue, frame, cunning, and virility ferocity—is set down beside a path along which an enemy habitually passes. At the psychological moment it turns into a lion, deals with the enemy, and at once reverts quietly and fully to its former shape. It may thus be used again and again by its happy owner.

The manifold intricacies of the matrilineal succession occupied our undivided attention during several sessions with Chiwali. The system is based on the thoroughly sound idea that there is seldom much room for reasonable doubt about the precise identity of a child's mother.

'That is a thing,' said Chiwali, pausing to have a pregnant young woman stand up before us to illustrate his point, 'that is easy to see.'

'While,' he added in a moment, 'as to the father—we know?'

Since it is through the *mukoka*, or navel cord, that the child is actually joined to its mother the whole Lala social structure is based on the *mukoka*. The word has thus come to bear a broader meaning of relationship, or family, and is, in Rhodesia

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usually translated into English as 'totem.' The use of a special word is necessary because a totem in a matrilineal tribe differs somewhat from our conception of a family. The difference can probably be indicated best by an example:

A woman of the Goat totem marries a man belonging to the totem of the Rocks. Two children are born to the couple, a boy and a girl. Both belong to the Goat totem since it is their mother's. When the girl marries her children in turn are Goats. On the boy's marriage, though he himself remains a Goat, his children belong to the totem from which he took his wife.

No Goat child may marry another member of the Goat totem no matter how distant the cousinship, according to European ideas, may be. There are no cousins in Lalaland; every member of the Goat totem stands to a newly born Goat child in a closer relationship that can be described only approximately as that of sister, mother, or brother. Inter-marriage among the Goats would therefore, of course, constitute incest.

On the other hand, since the father's Rock totem is different from his own no Goat child is considered any sort of kin to any of the Rocks and may marry among them with perfect impunity. A boy could, if the fancy happened to strike him, take his paternal grandmother to wife.

Feeling a trifle groggy after our mental struggles with the totem, we passed on presently to a less obscure phase of social life, one suggested by the bead head-dress worn by a pretty little village girl of about eleven. The child's hair was completely covered by a close-fitting cap of beads, half of which were red, half white.

Munsele, as a more fitting person than Chiwali to take up such a delicate subject with me, explained the head-dress.

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Douglas's male presence was excluded from the interview, though Chirupula acted in his usual capacity of interpreter. The arrangement did not surprise us as we already knew that an interpreter is often regarded in native Northern Rhodesia as something along the line of a telephone. His function is presumed, whenever such presumption is convenient, to be purely automatic.

The beads, said Munsele, had just been put on the girl's hair by the feminine members of her totem. The red ones symbolized life, the white, a condition of youth or innocence. The joining of the two in the cap served as an announcement to the men of the tribe that its wearer had now left childhood behind her and was ready to take up the mature life of a woman.

There is, of course, no such thing as a Lala spinster; each girl is married very soon after her beads are donned, her mother ably carrying on negotiations with all suitors. The successful contender for her hand pays for his bride-to-be in produce and livestock, supplemented later by a fixed period of manual labour in his mother-in-law's service.

When a Lala marriage fails to work out well a divorce may be obtained from a chief of the tribe. Though British law prevails everywhere in Northern Rhodesia, the Protectorate government very wisely leaves the settlement of a great many matters in the chiefs' hands. Divorce, which is usually only sought for one cause, falls into this category. If a marriage is barren at the end of the first year the disgruntled couple seeks an audience with the nearest chief, each to lodge a complaint against the other and demand suitable damages along with the divorce.

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Lala justice, like that of most African tribes, is based entirely on a system of payments. A man who has wronged another pays to the offended party an amount equal, in the judgment of the chief, to the damage done. Before British law became effective such a payment often had to be made in human life or in slavery; but now, of course, it is confined to labour or possessions. We learned how the payment rules apply to divorce when we were privileged to witness Chiwali's handling of a case.

The courtroom proved to be our usual meeting place under the tree by Chiwali's hut. Husband and wife arrived at the spot separately, each accompanied by a band of friends. The two groups seated themselves on opposite sides of Chiwali's chair, and each occupied the interval before proceedings started by staring with careful fixity at a point in the air just above the heads of the opposing faction. This interesting technique was carried over to the actual trial and produced the distinct impression throughout that each group was completely invisible to the other.

When Chiwali indicated his readiness to listen the woman rose to her feet first. She was a woman who looked as if she had scarcely reached her early teens. Folding her arms in the pose always assumed by Africa in the presence of a judge, she devoted several preliminary moments to directing a glare of alarming ferocity over the head of her husband.

Throughout her speech her husband and his supporters achieved the remarkable feat of appearing not to hear it, while they punctuated it at appropriate intervals with ejaculations expressive of incredulity, sorrow, and wrath.

When the man's turn came he directed into the air above



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his wife's head the longest and most artistically perfect sneer I have ever seen. She and her supporters now assumed the counter rôle of deaf chorus led vigorously by the young woman's mother, against whom the husband was also directing his suit.

His wife, of course, in failing to present him with a child had committed two offences—she had deprived him materially and had cast a serious slur on his manhood. But his mother-in-law had been guilty of no small crime herself when she had cheated him so cruelly in the marriage bargain. Had he not given the old woman three fine hoes, two cocks, four hens, and a piece of handsome calico, which his gesture indicated had been practically interminable in length, in return for the hand of her worthless daughter? Had he not walked many weary miles to a European trading store to obtain the calico and paid for it with more chickens and a veritable mountain of eggs? Had he not worked faithfully in her service for six long months as a dutiful son-in-law should? Well, then—!

When both sides of the case had been stated, re-stated, and amplified a sufficient number of times Chiwali made known his decision. It was one, I thought, that was practical in the extreme as well as beautifully adjusted to the tempo of village life.

The couple were to separate at once, announced Chiwali, and each was to arrange to take another mate. At the end of a year the identity of the offending party would doubtless be firmly established in the outcome of the new marriages and Chiwali would, at that time, decide on the appropriate amount of payment to be made.

When the two factions, having suddenly discovered each other's presence, had departed in a single, amicable group



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Chiwali elucidated the situation a little further for our benefit. If the wife should appear next year triumphantly displaying a baby and the husband should by then have no similar trophy to show, the judgment would, of course, go against him. He would then, Chiwali explained, have to pay his former wife not once, but three times. The first payment would cover damages incurred by his inadequacy as a husband, the second and third would take care of the two false accusations he had made against her. He would also have to compensate his mother-in-law for having wrongly accused her of cheating.

He would probably have a second divorce case on his hands by that time, I reflected, but decided that the thought involved too many endless complications to be taken up verbally with Chiwali.

One afternoon Chiwali arranged a tribal dance in our honour. We were amazed to find that the two dance leaders were Munsele and Wangwa, both of whom were well over seventy, but whose terpsichorean agility was shortly proven to be in no way impaired. One of Munsele's daughters was soloist. Her torso and face were painted in spots and stripes with a vegetable dye that looked like whitewash, and she rendered a spirited version of the dance with which a successful leopard hunter is greeted when he returns home with his prey.

All the Lala dancers were women and all wore fringes of reed around their hips, head-dresses made of zebra tail, and clusters of small gourds around their legs just below the knee. The seeds with which the gourds were filled rattled like castanets. These, with half a dozen drums, furnished the sole musical accompaniment to the dances.

Though I had not failed to fall under the spell of the drums

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I had heard in the Roan compound, I had until now thought of them collectively and had imagined that the size of each had been governed by the size of the log most conveniently available when the instrument was made. These erroneous impressions were corrected by the Balala, who made us aware that a definite species of tree must be found for each drum. The tree must be of proper size and age and must, moreover, have come from one of only certain localities. The time of year it is cut is important, too—the dry season must have begun, but not have advanced too far. This, of course, was a purely physical consideration, but the locality involved the presence of certain beneficent spirits.

Not every Lala tribesman may take a hand in the construction of a drum; he must belong to one of the tree totems, which presumably gives him an occult knowledge of wood. He does not, as a rule, act as drummer once his instrument is made. Drumming, like all Lala arts, passes down in a totem; one of the most effective performances we heard at Chiwali's was given by the five-year-old maternal nephew of the village's head drummer. The tiny creature, squatting athwart a cylinder that was several times his size, made the bush re-echo lustily for miles around.

The Lala drums gradually took on individuality for us during our stay in the village. We learned to recognize the different types and to refer nonchalantly to *kawitiko*, used for the routine dissemination of news to other villages, to *tumba*, the official mourner for the dead, to *mwimbi*, the dance drum, and so on.

Though the booming roll of any African drum gives the effect at a distance of being produced by the beat of a heavy stick, the Lalas use only their fingers and the palms of their hands,

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employing a rubbing rather than a beating motion. The hands are seldom raised more than a few inches from the drumhead. This technique was common to all of the Northern Rhodesian tribes that came under my personal observation.

It is conceivable that village life in the bush would lose its rhythm if the drums were taken away. There is scarcely an occasion that does not call for their use. There is the harvest to be celebrated, the dead to be mourned, evil spirits to be warded off, benevolent ones to be propitiated, rain to be invoked, returning hunters to be saluted, marriage or birth to be rejoiced over. Ceremonies or dances accompanied by appropriate drumming are innumerable. Lacking a special occasion, there are always idle hours to be whiled away, or emotions to be expressed, or perhaps a pot of beer, made of honey or grain, to be drunk. Drumming runs through everything; it is part of the fabric of life itself. The xylophone used by Chiwali was the only other musical instrument we saw in the hands of his people.

And there are, of course, messages to be sent to other villages. It is this aspect of African drumming that is most fascinating of all, because of the mystery that surrounds it.

That no white man has ever mastered the language of African drums is probably due in part to the fact that Africans themselves seem unable or unwilling to explain it, or even to say whether it is actually a language at all. That something more subtle than words, or even than a form of telegraphic code, is involved, seems indicated by the description a visitor to the Roan once gave us of an effort made by himself and several associates to investigate this particular phase of drumming.

They gave several drummers a certain piece of news which

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was to be drummed repeatedly so that they might learn and eventually record the sounds by means of which it was conveyed. The attitude of the drummers was apparently co-operative; they willingly sent the message rolling through the bush again and again. The only trouble was that the actual drumming was entirely different each time. There was, in the end, nothing of the slightest significance to record.

We visited one or two neighbouring villages during our stay with Chiwali. On these occasions the latter ordered a *machela* to be brought out for my use. My initial impulse to balk at getting into it, on the grounds that I had never liked the idea of being propelled by purely human power, was overcome by Chirupula who advised me to sacrifice a scruple which Chiwali would never understand to appreciation of the old chief's kindly thought for my welfare.

I found a *machela* ride to be a unique experience—though not one to be indulged in too freely by anyone who is subject to sickness on the high seas. The conveyance consists of a canvas hammock slung on a pole, each end of which rests on the shoulder of a carrier. The pair moves at a rhythmic jog trot, giving the hammock a gentle, sidewise swinging motion.

Chiwali always gave me eight carriers, allowing four relays. The long stout pole was light and fibrous, but my hundred and six pounds would have constituted a weight heavy enough to rub the skin off of shoulders that bore it too long, even through the protective wads of cloth used. Each pair ran for about a mile at a time. Chiwali selected my carriers with an eye to their wind and muscular development, but I wished more than once that he had also taken the matter of height into consideration. A *machela's* hammock does not clear the ground

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very far at best and a protruding stone can come into painful contact with a rather vulnerable part of its occupant's anatomy.

The most extraordinary feature of a *machela* ride lies in the skill with which experienced carriers shift the apparatus from one pair to another. They do not stop for this, or even slow down. Each fresh carrier trots in behind or in front of the one whose place he is to take, falls into step and puts his shoulder under the pole. As he assumes the weight the other lowers his shoulder and steps aside. There is no jolt, there is no break in the hammock's swing; with my eyes shut I found it impossible to tell when the shifting was done.

It was happily after my last ride was over that I was informed of the special honour Chiwali had done me in lending me the particular *machela* I had used. No living person had ever ridden in it before, for it was the special conveyance in which the remains of dead Lala chiefs were carried to their last resting place. The honour was one which I do not think even the wish to be gracious to a living chief would have nerved me to accept.

On our last afternoon in the village Chiwali electrified us by an invitation to attend a Lala religious ceremony. It was to be one that no European, not even excepting Chirupula, had seen before, though the latter enjoyed the distinction of being the only white man who had ever attended the 'planting' of a dead Lala chief. Lala religion is based on ancestor worship and the afternoon's ceremony was to be held in honour of the royal dead of the tribe.

At the western edge of the village we had noticed a small clearing, in the centre of which stood an odd little structure. It was like the skeleton of a miniature native hut, with widely spaced sticks supporting a thatched roof just high enough for

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a man, if he were not too tall, to stand upright under its central peak. It was about five feet in diameter and we had taken it for an unfinished chicken house.

It was actually, we now discovered, the most important structure in the village—the spirit house in which were kept the physical emblems of the tribe's religion.

The ceremony began about five o'clock with the assembling at the little hut of every adult member of the community. Our three chairs were placed opposite the gap in the sticks that served as the eastern door and a mat was spread beside us for Munsele and Wangwa. The villagers who had no special part to play in proceedings sat cross-legged on the ground, forming a large semi-circle to right and left, with men on one side and women on the other.

Chiwali was the last to arrive. He had removed his overcoat as unsuitable for wear on a purely native occasion. His loins were wrapped in the usual strip of calico and he had donned a head-dress that we had not seen before. The cock feathers of which it was composed were red and black. Red for life, black for death, symbolizing the Lala chief's ancient power of life and death over members of his tribe.

Since the day of our first meeting our association with Chiwali had been so informal and friendly that we had, we now realized, rather lost sight of his position. But when he seated himself on the throne that had been placed for him close to the door of the little hut we were reminded that he was, in simple fact, a king. We had never seen him lose his natural dignity, even in his lightest moments. But a subtle quality of remoteness was added now, as if his spirit had withdrawn to a secret place, inaccessible to the spirits of those



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around him. His 'throne' was actually a small wooden affair, more like a low footstool than anything else, but it was, nevertheless, the throne, upon which no one but Chiwali might sit.

After he had taken his place only three persons remained standing. These were Musonde Mutende, Chiwali's son, Chuie Mutanda, son of the eldest queen, and an old woman named Muhashya. Muhashya had been pointed out to us as the member of the community whose duty it was to lead the wailing done at sunset after the death of a chief.

The three now spread a new grass mat on the ground in front of the hut. Muhashya went inside and began lifting down a number of objects from the rafters under the roof. Each was held carefully in both hands and passed to Musonde, who took them in like manner and placed them on the mat in an order silently directed by Chiwali. Chuie, meanwhile, standing near the door of the hut moved his fingers over the head of a big drum that we had not seen before, so lightly as to produce the effect of a whisper.

One by one appeared eight hunting bows from which only ragged ends of string dangled; eight miniature carved thrones like the one occupied by Chiwali; several wooden platters; a wooden pillow or head-rest; a pair of horns; a xylophone like Chiwali's; some broken bits of *kalabash*; a few fragments of ivory; a curious double bell forged from one piece of iron; and a handful of rudely carved bone beads on a rotting bit of bark string.

Becoming conscious of a tense stillness around me that made the soft drumming seem loud, I glanced at the crowd of seated villagers. Every face was grave and intent, every eye was fixed on the mat's contents. For in this strange little collection of

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objects the villagers were looking at their most precious treasures, relics of their departed great ones, kings and queens of the Balala. The royal family of the Mushiri branch, as far back as its history had been handed down, was here represented: Mwapetembe, Malama, Kalunga, Mawonde, Nkata, Chiwoli, Chiwali the First, and Chiwali the Second. Eight generations of chiefs covering a period of over two hundred years; matrilineal ancestors of the present chief, Chiwali the Third.

A length of new white calico was now produced together with a bowl of freshly ground mealie meal. The calico was torn in strips and a separate strip knotted securely about each relic, after which the meal was sprinkled over all of them. This was symbolic of clothing and feeding the royal ancestors, thus showing them the reverence in which their memories were held by their tribe.

A short silence was broken presently by a weird sound that seemed at first to rise from the ground. Starting softly, it grew in intensity until we perceived that it emanated from the old woman, Muhashya, who crouched alone inside the hut. Tapping her mouth with her open palm she uttered a thin wail, too high-pitched, it seemed, to be produced by a human throat. Chuiie began a low, rolling accompaniment on the drum, Musonde rang the double iron bell that had come from the spirit house. The men of the tribe joined in by humming resonantly through closed lips, the women with a wail like Muhashya's.

The strange symphony rose slowly to a crescendo of sound that seemed to fill the world, then fell away, just as slowly, to silence. It was repeated eight times, alternated by a clapping of hands—a clapping that also started softly, grew louder, and

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slowly died away. The wordless sounds in the fading light had a disembodied quality; their rising and falling cadence achieved the effect of a long procession going by; it was as if the old chiefs themselves were passing, with their retinues, in review.

Just as the sun reached the horizon a long bar of light fell across the clearing, touching with soft radiance the roof of the little spirit house, the row of small relics, and Chiwali's gaunt, absorbed face. It might have been a sign direct from Spiritland, a sign that the Lala ancestors were pleased with the recognition they had just received and were now back, satisfied, in their abode in the faraway west. Darkness fell softly just as the shaft retreated and the last handclap ceased, bringing the simple and yet oddly impressive ceremony to an end. Still under its spell the villagers rose quietly and drifted away by twos and threes, leaving only the chief performers and ourselves at the hut.

After a few bemused moments, Musonde, Chuie, and Muhashya set fire to a small pile of faggots nearby and in the light that it gave began to replace the relics on the spirit house rafters.

The ray of sun striking had drawn my attention a few minutes before to a curious little object—a small bundle depending by a piece of string from the limb of the only tree near the spirit house. I now asked what this might be. It was, I learned, 'lion medicine,' though of a different character from the one used as a charm against an enemy. This contained the vital elements of a lion just as the other did, but it had been placed here so that when Chiwali went to join his ancestors he would find no difficulty in assuming the form of a lion if he chose to follow Shingo's example.

## Chapter Twelve

The thought of the aged Chiwali sitting so composedly under this preparation for his own death was as chilling as a breath of cold wind, for it brought up only too vividly the whole macabre procedure that Chirupula had described as being followed on such an occasion.

The flesh of a Lala chief, it seemed, was never put underground as this would not preclude the possibility of its falling into desecrating hands. Though the bones were buried the process was never described in such final terms. 'Planted' was better because it implied the possibility of return.

To separate flesh from bones a dead chief's body was bound in its pre-natal position—further supporting the idea of re-birth—and was then placed in his former hut, with a clay wall several inches high built immediately around it. It remained there while complete decomposition took place, while certain chosen villagers alternated in sitting day and night inside the stench-filled hut and the rest wailed outside every evening as the sun went down. No man in the village, incidentally, might approach a woman while all this was going on, the penalty for doing so being castration.

When the royal bones were clean at last they were planted in a secret spot known to only a few men of the tribe—and, of course, to Chirupula. The maggots that now represented the royal flesh were carefully collected from the clay enclosure which had been built to keep any of them from escaping and were sealed tightly in a clay urn. And finally, the chief's former village was evacuated, the urn being left to burn in the fire set to the deserted huts.

I shivered, tried not to look at Chiwali, and wished that I had never caught sight of the bundle. It was extremely de-

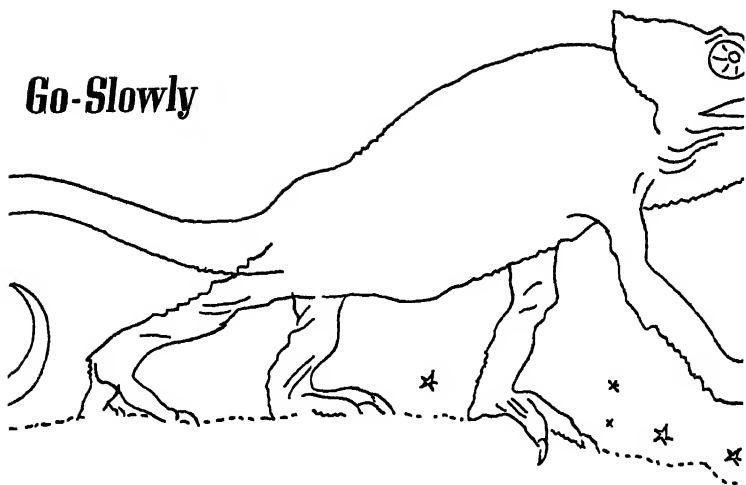
### *Chiwali the Third*

pressing to have our last day in the royal village end on such a gruesome note.

And I am therefore still grateful to Chiwali himself for the relieving touch of humour he unconsciously supplied in the end, when his son hurried a little in replacing the last relics on the spirit house rafters. Chiwali stopped him as he gathered up several at a time and told him to put them back as they had been taken out, one by one.

‘No royal ancestor,’ remarked Chiwali sternly, ‘likes to be moved about in handfuls.’

## Go-Slowly



As I WRITE the title of this chapter the four walls around me seem to give way to the heat and the light and the silence that hang over the Rhodesian bush at noon. I am sitting again on a fallen log, under the trees, listening to an Awemba chief tell a story about a chameleon and a black man and something that happened way back at the beginning of time.

The chameleon took on a quality that day from which I shall probably never quite be able to dissociate it. Meeting its cold, protruding, one-eyed stare, or watching it begin to move forward with its strange, incredibly slow ground gait, I am sure that I shall always feel a momentary stir of the same uneasiness I felt then. Africa, through the chief and his story, touched the chameleon indelibly with her fantastic and potent wand.

The chameleon is fantastic enough in its own right, heaven knows. It is, as a matter of fact, most famous for its least distinctive characteristic, since a number of other cold-blooded animals have equal power to change colour. My native state of Georgia is inhabited by a species of tiny lizard which I

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cherished throughout my childhood under the mistaken impression that it was a chameleon because it did change colour. I was therefore singularly ill-prepared for the bizarre creature that I encountered one morning in the dust of a bush road. It looked like a hang-over from another era—a sort of prehistoric monster in miniature.

It was obviously some kind of lizard, though instead of lying decently flat as a well-behaved reptile should it stood well up off the ground on its four long, spindly legs, each of which terminated in two long bundles of fused toes placed directly opposite each other. It was rather larger, too, than the lizards to which I was accustomed; from snout to base of tail it must have measured about six inches. The tail, fully as long again, stuck out straight behind a little way, then rolled downward into a beautiful, flat spiral. The large head was all but split in half by a mouth set in a peculiarly sardonic expression. Above the blunt snout a thin, bony growth rose like a cock's comb and appeared again along the spine in a sharp, toothed ridge.

But the eyes were the most amazing feature of all. Tiny pupils were mounted on two large round knobs that protruded to an alarming distance from each side of the head. The eyes moved quite independently of each other; at the moment I caught sight of their owner one of them pointed straight forward, the other was slewed around, backward and upward, to stare directly and coldly at my face.

Had I not happened to look directly at it the lizard would have escaped my notice altogether, partly because its colour blended so perfectly with the grey dust of the road, but principally because it held itself so still. Poised on three of its hind

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and one of its fore feet, it was as still as a statue, as still as death itself. The second fore foot was stretched forward in an uncertain, groping gesture, as if its owner were blind and had frozen to immobility in the act of feeling its way along with that queer, sensitive-looking, forked member.

I froze to immobility too, consumed by curiosity and sure that the smallest movement on my part would send the peculiar little apparition scuttling off into the bush. My caution was quite futile, however, for at that moment there appeared around a curve in the road a native boy on a bicycle. At sight of me the lad threw both hands up in the air, wobbled violently for a moment and then fell heavily, sideways, to the ground. The bicycle wobbled on alone a little way, bringing up with a fearful clatter only a few feet from me and the object of my interest.

I came eventually to know that every native of Northern Rhodesia falls heavily but quite harmlessly off his bicycle the moment he glimpses the slightest suggestion of an obstacle in the road before him. But at the time I forgot everything else in my fear that this one must have been seriously hurt. The agility with which he bounded up told me that he had not; he was, rather, anxious to see if I had sustained any injury from his errant bicycle. Each of us reassured as to the other's safety, he grinned, saluted, and, with all the tenderness of a loving mother, leaned over his machine preparatory to picking it up.

Suddenly he emitted a sharp yelp and pointed dramatically to a spot in the road between us. My jaw dropped as I looked down and saw that the lizard was still there. It had not moved an inch during what, from its point of view, must have seemed



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a major cataclysm. One bulging eye still squinted fixedly at me; the other moved rapidly back and forth to cover both the bicycle and its owner. Head, body, and extended fore foot rigidly maintained their precise original attitude.

I was trying to summon the Kitchen Kaffir phrase for 'What is that?' when the boy forestalled me by bursting into excited speech.

'Skelem, Mamal' he cried loudly, 'skelem! Lo hamba-kahle!'

He forthwith jerked his bicycle unceremoniously from the ground and began to back hastily off with it. I was surprised to see that his shiny, ebony skin had taken on a greyish hue and that the whites of his eyes showed all around the staring pupils like those of a frightened horse. He evidently felt that this was no time to fool with the precarious business of riding, for, pausing once only long enough to turn himself around and call 'skelem!' again over his shoulder, he disappeared around the curve at a lumbering run, still dragging the bicycle awkwardly along beside him.

I did not know then what '*hamba-kahle*' meant, but recognized '*skelem*' as a term applied indiscriminately to any living creature regarded by the natives as in any way bad or dangerous. Respect was added to the interest with which I turned to look again at the intrepid little lizard.

And at last I noticed something that furnished the clue to its identity. For the colour of its skin had changed radically since I had first come upon it. A dark, slightly mottled grey had turned to a yellowish white with irregular patches of light green showing here and there. I learned later that emotion is the chief factor influencing the chameleon's colour changes;

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turning pale with greenish tinges was its present very human reaction to fright.

Suddenly the chameleon began to move. I say 'suddenly' only because it had remained static so long by this time that I had begun to think it must be petrified; certainly the action into which it now went was anything but sudden.

First its body began to sway backward and forward very slowly and deliberately as if for the purpose of gathering momentum. On perhaps the sixth forward sway the extended fore foot touched the ground ahead, tentatively at first, feeling the ground with its toes. Presently the foot went down and assumed its share of weight so gingerly as to give the impression that its ability to do so was a matter of grave doubt. Now a protracted pause occurred, during which nothing whatever happened. Just as I had concluded that the creature had given up all idea of moving any farther the swaying motion began again and the laborious process of setting another foot forward was under way.

As I watched the grotesque yet somehow stately process, I realized that it was suggestive of something I had seen or known before. Was it a slow-motion moving picture? Or a body swimming dreamily under water? No, neither of these comparisons was exactly right. Then the memory of a fairy story read in childhood came back to me, and I knew what it was I'd been trying to think of. Later I was very much pleased that the idea should have come to me so early in my acquaintance with the chameleon. The creature moved as if some peculiar outside force fettered its limbs; as if, I thought, a spell of enchantment had been cast over it to prevent its moving any faster.

Recalling that there was said to be nothing like a pet chame-

## Go-Slowly

leon for keeping a house free of insects, and knowing that Dorothy, too, would be fascinated by the personality of this small reptile, I urged it on to a stick and carried it home. We placed it amongst the potted plants on the front verandah, where its arboreal nature at once became apparent. Those forked feet were plainly fashioned for gripping a branch, that long flexible tail for curling securely around one. Now, though it still moved slowly, it moved with assurance, and even a certain solemn nonchalance.

We spent an enthralled afternoon watching the new member of the household consume flies. The performance was an almost incredible one. Whenever a fly buzzed on the porch the chameleon became as rigid as it had been in the road. It had already adjusted its colour to suit its new surroundings; its stillness now rendered it invisible to any but the closest scrutiny. The only evidence of life about it showed in those weird swivel eyes as they relieved each other in following the flight of the prospective prey. Sooner or later the latter buzzed within a few inches of the chameleon's nose.

The first time a tongue about six inches long flicked out of its mouth and snapped back again like a stretched elastic we found it impossible to say just what had happened, beyond that the fly had disappeared. The action was too lightning-like to follow in detail. After two or three catches we perceived that the slender organ ended in a large bulb which was evidently covered with a sticky substance to which the victims adhered at a touch. Then we noticed that the throat bulged and worked vigorously a few moments before each catch. This, we learned, meant that muscles were bringing the bulbous tip of the tongue forward preliminary to shooting it out.

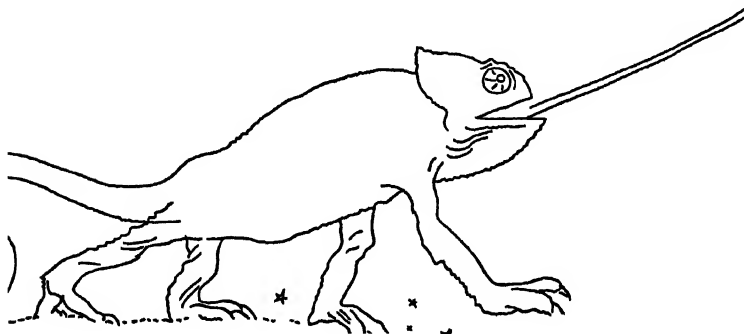
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The mechanism of the actual shooting is apparently a question which has interested scientists since the days of Aristotle, judging by the mass of literature which has been turned out on the subject. A great many theories, some very fancy indeed, have been evolved to explain it. One, for instance, held that the chameleon managed the ejection by suddenly inflating its tongue with blood; another that it generated air pressure, by some unspecified means, in its throat. The somewhat less romantic fact seems to be pretty well established now that the action is purely muscular in nature.

In my preoccupation with the chameleon itself I temporarily quite forgot the incident of the boy on the bicycle. It had not in any case made a very strong impression on me at the time. We all, of course, have our personal aversions. Face to face with a cockroach I have always experienced an almost irresistible impulse to scream and run. I had put the boy's behaviour down to the probability that he entertained a similar antipathy to chameleons.

But presently we began to notice that all of our domestic staff carefully avoided going anywhere near our pet on the porch; and then I went over to the company compound one day, where I saw a very odd thing happen.

It was Saturday noon and I wanted to photograph the crowd



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of natives that always lined up then at the rations store to receive the weekly food supply issued by the company. The gathering was always an interesting one, made up as it was of members of some thirty different tribes. Perhaps it would have taken an anthropologist accurately to identify feature and colour of skin, but there was something else in evidence that did not need such expert scrutiny.

Looking at the boys standing there in line you could almost name the number of weeks each one had worked on the mine. There were the newest additions to the company's payroll still wearing the loincloths in which they had lately emerged from the bush. There were those who so far had only been able to finance the purchase of a shirt or a pair of trousers or a coat. Garment after garment had been added to this foundation, to flower at last in the complete products of the local trading store, any one of whom, in his red, green, blue, purple, checked, plaid, or striped suit and his equally bright tie and shirt, might well have caused Solomon in all his glory to slink away, cowed. The final note of elegance was usually supplied by a pair of large, horn-rimmed spectacles. Each burst of sartorial splendour was apt to be accented by the fact that it terminated abruptly at the ankles; shoes, in those early days on the mine, were seldom worn.

A good many wives always came to the rations store too, since the waiting in line offered a fine chance for the leisurely exchange of compound gossip. Most of these stuck, more conservatively than their husbands, to wrapping themselves tightly in lengths of calico; innumerable almost naked piccannins tumbled about under foot.

Everyone carried a collection of receptacles; hand-woven reed

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baskets, home-made clay pots, hollowed-out gourds, shiny tin buckets from the trading store, tin cans, paper bags, boxes, coffee pots, pitchers; anything that would hold rations would do—even that small object which is an inevitable piece of domestic equipment in outlying parts of the globe, but which, in European households at least, is usually located modestly under the bed.

I was selecting a point of vantage for my camera when I was joined by a young English member of the compound administrative staff. His ingenuous features wore the happy anticipation of a small boy about to heave a snowball at a silk hat; the hand he held under his jacket plainly concealed something of great importance.

‘Watch me have some fun with these beggars,’ he said. ‘You’ll get a picture worth taking in a minute if you’re quick enough about it.’

Calling out to attract the attention of the crowd, he drew his hand from under his coat and raised it high above his head. Balanced on his palm and somehow managing to look extremely dignified and aloof in spite of its precarious position, stood a small chameleon.

Up to this moment a medley of chatter and laughter had been rising from the waiting line of natives. During the few seconds it took for every pair of eyes to focus on the chameleon all sound died away, all movement ceased. For perhaps three seconds longer there was a dead stillness. The people standing there in line might have been a picture painted on the whitewashed wall of the storehouse—a study of bodies in abruptly arrested movement, of faces endlessly repeating a look of curious, shocked blankness.

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Then a woman suddenly swooped about, snatched up a piccannin from the ground behind her and ran like a rabbit for a nearby hut. It was a signal for the whole crowd to break and scatter in all directions like a pile of leaves suddenly attacked by a high wind. Bare feet scurrying over dusty, sun-baked earth make little sound; except for one or two howls from other hastily collected piccannins and the clatter of a few dropped utensils, it was an oddly noiseless scattering, and an absolutely complete one. It left the young Englishman and me standing alone gazing at each other with open mouths, he plainly quite as staggered as I by the degree of success crowning his coup.

'Hullo!' he exclaimed after the first breathless moment. 'I'd no idea they'd get the wind up as badly as all that! I hope they come back soon,' he added uneasily; 'if they don't show up for their rations I'll probably get the sack.'

My attention thus forcibly called to it, I began to wonder in earnest why a creature so common in the country and so perfectly harmless as the chameleon should be such a universal object of terror to the natives. A factor which added to the strangeness of the situation was the very name by which the chameleon was designated locally. I knew now what '*hambakahle*,' the word the boy had used in the road that day, meant. Like most native names it was exceedingly apt, but it did not seem to hold an implication that was in any way ominous. *Hamba kahle*—go slowly. Why on earth should these people be so afraid of a creature known to them, ignominiously, as a 'go-slowly?'

There seemed one obvious way to find out, and I accordingly began to question our own domestic staff, the boys who worked

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in the company office, and the servants of a number of our neighbours. The sole result of these inquiries was the intensification of my own curiosity, because it at once became plain that the natives were quite as loath to talk about a chameleon as they were to have anything to do with it. And there is nothing in the world that can bog down so hopelessly as a subject upon which African natives do not wish to talk.

I came across a book about this time in which the author gave it as his opinion that Africans were afraid of a chameleon because they believed the creature to be spitting poison when it ejected its tongue to catch an insect. But if this were the simple fact why should they mind discussing it? They were vocal enough about their belief that the blue agama lizard was full of deadly poison.

The answer was the same that answered so many other questions in the country. The animal *imfwiti* that inhabited the bush were as innumerable as they were varied in kind, and no *imfwiti*, of course, should ever be talked about too freely. For if the careless use of its name can anger even a well-disposed spirit it would be more than foolish to chatter about a malevolent one, and so attract its always unwelcome attention.

The Balamba's Snake was one of the many cases of animal *imfwiti* in which fanciful touches had been added to the already dangerous character of a living prototype. In such a case the line drawn between physical and superstitious fear was often so thin and ill-defined that it was impossible to say where one began and the other ended.

Almost every dangerous animal, actually, was endowed in native thought with a touch of the *imfwiti*—hence the belief shared by a good many tribes that no mention of a leopard



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or a lion hunter's objective should ever be made beforehand, or while he was out. Before British law put an end to such practices many a woman whose husband was killed in the hunt was subsequently put to death by her tribe, on the theory that she must have spoken unwisely during his absence and thus given the *imfwiti* power of his quarry a chance to be exercised.

The Door Post Animal of Awemba legend, its description based admittedly on the surmise of those who feared it, combined the attributes of two living denizens of the bush—the lion and the hyena. Where the Door Post Animal spent its daylight hours was immaterial, for it only came to harass the tribe upon which it preyed at night, slipping quietly through the darkness up to an Awemba hut. If the hut's occupants happened to wake they smelled the pungent, distinctive hyena smell and merely shouted to frighten away the beast known as the most contemptible coward in the bush.

But this animal did not go away from the hut. Instead, it pressed itself close against the door post outside and stood there waiting. It stood waiting patiently all night until the first person came out in the morning. That person was only heard from once, dreadfully, and was never seen again at all. The others, cowering inside the hut, dared not stir, dared not come out till the victim's last heart-shaking scream had died in the distance. For who would knowingly face the terrible Door Post Animal? Who, consequently, had ever seen it, except its luckless prey?

There was, of course, the itinerant trader who travelled all over Rhodesia and came occasionally to the Roan—to tell about how, in the country immediately adjoining the Awemba's an old tribesman had once offered him a certain animal skin in a

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trade. He had refused the skin because his wife, who had travelled with him then, would not have it in the lorry when it was so obviously badly cured.

But the trader had regretted letting it go ever since—it had been a very curious skin. The head and mane were those of a lion, but the body didn't suggest a lion at all—the hair was too coarse and wiry and showed distinct dark spots on the yellowish ground. And the very feature that had balked his wife had struck him as especially interesting. The pungent smell the skin gave off was a very distinctive smell. It was a smell given off by only one animal—the hyena.

Peculiar instances of cross-breeding, of course, have been known to occur; though a garrulous trader's memory of a curious skin is probably not a thing to be trusted too far as evidence, and no *imfwiti* in the bush really needs such support, in any case, to those who believe in it.

Nor does such belief always derive from an animal's dangerous physical character. In spite of its insignificant size and entire harmlessness, I came in time to learn that the chameleon is one of the most deeply and universally dreaded *imfwiti* in the whole of south central Africa, its legend being bound up vitally with the very genesis of man. There are endless tribal versions of the precise manner in which the diminutive creature affected human destiny, but each version agrees in general tenor with the story told by the old Awemba chief.

It was Chirupula Stephenson, as usual, who prevailed upon the chief to tell us his story when we once camped for a few days near the latter's village.

Even so, it required a good deal of persuasion. While Douglas and I sat on one log and waited, Chirupula, seated

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with the chief on another, talked long and earnestly to the old man. At first the latter only shook his head and looked obstinate, but after a while he began to cast more and more prolonged glances in our direction, appearing, for some reason, to take a special interest in the shorthand notebook I held in hopeful readiness on my knee.

At the end of perhaps an hour he sent to the village for his son, a youth who had attended mission school and who presently asked me respectfully if I would allow him to examine my book. Somewhat mystified, but anxious to co-operate in every possible way, I handed it over. The son studied several pages of pothooks closely. He obviously could not read them, but seemed nevertheless to find them full of some sort of significance. Admiring ejaculations escaped him from time to time, he laughed delightedly once or twice and nodded his head emphatically as he finally returned the book to me and made his report on it to his father. There was plainly some mysterious connection between the book and the chameleon story, because the chief now beamed upon me with entire approval and began his narrative, pausing obligingly after every few words to give Chirupula time to interpret.

Way back, said the chief, at the beginning of things there were on the earth only water and rocks and plants and animals. Then He Whose Name Is Not Spoken decided that He would put some men into the world. At first these men were not very much of a success. They were all too much alike in the first place, and to make it worse none of them was very smart, or very good, or very pleasing to look at. The more He Whose Name Is Not Spoken saw of them the less He liked them,



and the more He felt that His idea about stocking the world with them had been a mistake.

He thought the situation over for a while and then He had another idea. He would, He decided, call all the men together. Then He would give each one certain gifts which would not only make them different from each other, but would make all of them better all round. He would give them wisdom and strength and skill, courage, goodness and beauty. He would give them quick wits and sharp eyes and keen ears, and all sorts of other fine things—so many that the sun crossed the sky several times before He had them all ready.

Then one morning, very early, He sent the animals, which always acted as His messengers, out to fetch the men together so that they might receive their gifts. To one man He sent the lion, to another the leopard, to another the elephant, and so on. To fetch the very last man He Whose Name Is Not Spoken

## Go-Slowly

found that He had only one creature left to send. This was the chameleon. The chameleon was small, of course, but in those days it could run like lightning along the ground, and it should have made every bit as good a messenger as any of the other animals.

But on this day of all others when it should have run the chameleon did not run. It did not even walk fast to fetch its man. It dawdled and delayed so much along the way, in fact, that by the time the man at last arrived to receive his gifts all the best ones had already been given out. The man the chameleon had been sent to fetch had to content himself with a few poor scraps that none of the others had thought worth taking.

The others all laughed at him when they saw him.

‘How is it you have come at all?’ they asked. ‘You are no better off than you were before. You might just as well have stayed where you were and so saved yourself some trouble.’

They showed him their gifts, and then they went away and left the last man sitting with his worthless scraps at his feet.

‘That man,’ said the chief slowly, ‘was the black man. We’—his thin hands, raised briefly from his knees, included a whole race in their slight, poignant gesture—‘are his children.’

The black man, went on the chief, was in despair at first when he saw what he had lost; but when he understood how it was he had come to lose it his mood changed and his anger was terrible to see. He went to the chameleon and, calling the other men around him, put upon it the worst curse he could think of.

‘You have cheated me,’ he cried to the chameleon, ‘out of all the fine things that these other men have. By the way you

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came to fetch me, dawdling and stopping and lingering along the road, have you done this to me. You moved as if you had weights on your feet, as if your limbs were palsied and weak with age. You moved as if it were not possible for you to move in any other way.

'So now hear what I say, Chameleon, and let all men hear my words. And let Him Whose Name Is Not Spoken hear them too and lend them power, for He knows that they are just ones and no more than you deserve.

'May you never again, Chameleon, move any faster than you moved when you came to fetch me for my gifts. May every living creature outstrip you forever as they outstripped you that day. May you never again go quickly to catch the insects you would eat, or to run from the danger that threatens you. May you always go slowly, Chameleon—slowly—slowly—slowly—!'

The chief had risen to his feet to deliver this speech. His thin body was tensed under his loose, flapping coat, his outstretched hands shook with emotion. Every line in his face had deepened; his words rang with such fierce conviction that he might have been his own frustrated and furious ancestor crying to a savage god and a primitive world his outrage and his consuming lust for revenge. Was that only a dry leaf that stirred on the ground at his feet, or was it a small, hostile ghost, the ghost of Lesa's faithless messenger come back across the centuries to listen once more to the echo of an old malediction?

From that day on, the chief continued after a pause, during which he resumed his seat on the log, there has been nothing but hatred and enmity between the chameleon and the black

## Go-Slowly

man. The man still hates the chameleon for the trick it played on him so long ago; the chameleon hates the man because of the curse under which it has never from that day ceased to labour.

On the man's side, however, there is more than hate; there is also fear, for he well knows that no matter how slowly the chameleon may move it moves now toward only one objective—a chance, in its turn, to avenge itself.

Of course the chameleon does not expect to accomplish its purpose by spitting poison—the chief dismissed the suggestion with an impatient wave of the hand—but by a means that every sensible person knows to be far more deadly. Had I not observed, he asked, how a chameleon was not like other creatures? How it could turn itself into a leaf or a piece of bark or even into dust; how it could see everything everywhere at once, with eyes that move, not together as eyes ought to move, but one this way and the other that? What need had such a creature of a poisonous tongue?

Glancing up from my notes to meet the chief's eyes, I felt a slight shiver go down my spine. A knowledge of something secret and sinister and dark looked out of those eyes—something that Africa had always known and that we, perhaps, reassured by the gadgets and the appointments of our material world, had only forgotten. The bright sunlight dimmed for a moment, the noonday heat chilled; the bush around us was a shadowy arena, in which two oddly assorted antagonists waged a furtive, implacable warfare . . .

Then the illusion was gone, and I was sitting under the hot sun again looking at an elderly black man, a man dressed grotesquely in a loincloth and the ragged remnant of a British

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army overcoat which was at least three sizes too large for him. A man who believed rather pathetically in witchcraft and in the potency of malignant spirits and evil spells. And I was thanking him gravely for telling me his naive little story about the chameleon.

When I asked Chirupula in an aside what I ought to give the chief in return, he told me to tear out any page of my notebook containing shorthand characters and let him have that. This, said Chirupula, was the only reward the chief wanted. Douglas and I gaped in astonishment as the old man took the sheet with something approaching reverence and thanked me for it with an almost tearful gratitude. When we left he was carefully stowing it away in the lining of his voluminous outer garment. We could scarcely wait until we were out of earshot to satisfy our curiosity about the whole shorthand episode.

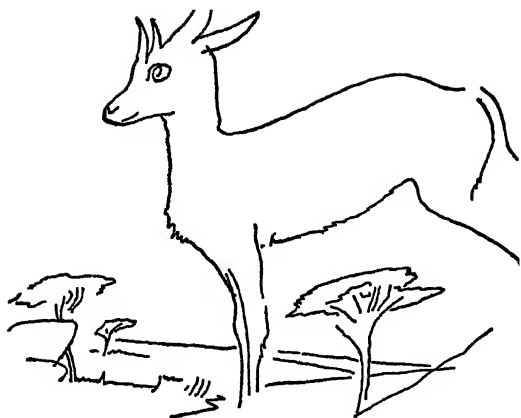
Chirupula then explained that he had found it necessary to use a little strategy in order to overcome the chief's reluctance to tell his story. He had suggested that I might be an excellent person to hear it because of my knowledge of a certain secret and occult way of writing. If I were to put the story of the chameleon down in these characters, who knew how powerful a charm the thing might form? The son had testified enthusiastically to the fact that the scrawls in my notebook were nothing at all like the English letters he had been taught to make in mission school.

No doubt it is true, on the whole, that ignorance of the future is our greatest blessing. No doubt a full revelation of what lies ahead of it would fill the stoutest heart with dismay. But occasionally there comes a time when a little foreknowl-



### *Go-Slowly*

edge would be a delightful thing. The hours I spent in a business school overlooking Broadway were, I think, among the dullest in my experience. How much they might have been brightened by a fleeting vision of a creature forever condemned because of its treachery to go slowly, by the realization that what I was actually doing, as I laboriously learned to write shorthand, was qualifying to arm an African ruler against an ancient enemy of his race.



## *Mr. Robins of Tom's*

WE MET Mr. Robins of Tom's on one of our annual vacation trips. The usual question of what we should do with a forthcoming holiday was up for discussion when someone said:

'Why don't you go down and see Tom's?'

Asking what and where Tom's might be, I was informed that it was a private game reserve in Southern Rhodesia situated close to the Great North Road between Victoria Falls and Wankie, source of the mine's coal supply. It was called "Tom's" after its original owner, but had for the past sixteen years been in the possession of Mr. H. G. Robins, an Englishman of about sixty-five. He had bought Tom's with the idea of raising cattle on it, but had shortly given up ranching, sold most of his domestic stock, and converted the place into what it had been ever since—a sanctuary for the wild life of Southern Rhodesia.

Tom's, our informant went on, comprised forty square miles of bush and dambo. Because of peculiarities of topography it was usually the only area in a large district to retain sources of

### *Mr. Robins of Tom's*

drinking water that were available to animals through the dry season. The Dett River, which crossed it, was supplemented by several water holes which had only rarely been known to dry up. As a consequence, the concentration and variety of wild life on Tom's, particularly as the dry season drew to a close, was generally considered the greatest to be found in a comparable area anywhere in Africa.

Further inquiry brought out the fact that concentration of game was not the only feature of Tom's. Its owner was a gentleman of peculiarly strong character, who saw to it personally and forcefully that the sanctity of his property as a reserve was respected. He not only waged a relentless war on poachers, but placed a set of exceedingly stringent rules on the conduct of legitimate visitors. After fifteen years of such immunity the animals on Tom's were in the habit of standing quietly to watch a car pass them within a few yards, thus allowing themselves to be seen at remarkably close range.

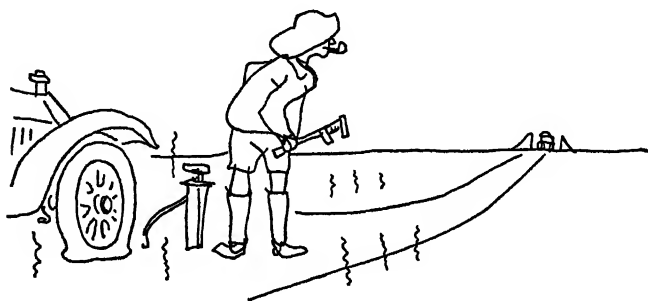
The prospect of seeing under such favourable conditions several species of animal not found in the local bush made us decide to visit Tom's. As a preliminary step we set about getting a letter of introduction to Mr. Robins, who was said to have turned strangers away more than once for no stronger reason than a quickly formed opinion of their unsuitability to view the Robins game. The Manager of the Wankie Collieries not only supplied us with a letter to present on arrival, but took the further precaution of writing Mr. Robins directly on our behalf.

To strike the game concentration at its best, we planned to drive down to Tom's as close to the end of the dry season as seemed safe; it was never wise to take a chance on being

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caught by the rains on any return trip through the Rhodesias. This started us off in weather that caused us considerable grief on our second day out.

As we descended into the low Zambesi Valley from Kalomo the end of the dry season heat became so intense that the patches on our rather aged tubes began to 'creep.' In the



seventy-five-mile stretch between Kalomo and Victoria Falls we did thirteen distinct repair jobs.

With no wayside filling station or garage to come to our rescue, each repair job meant that we ourselves removed the tire, took out the tube, blew it up again to find out just which patch was causing the trouble (on release of pressure every patch looked innocently secure), replaced it with a new one, blew the tire up once more with our hand pump, and put it back on the car.

Leaving Kalomo early in the morning, we had confidently expected to have lunch at the Falls and to reach Tom's late that afternoon. We actually arrived at the Falls at seven in the evening, without having had any lunch, and, until we passed through Livingstone, without having glimpsed another human being all day.

Mr. Robins of Tom's

Throughout the latter part of the morning and the entire afternoon, however, we had an excellent view of the Smoke that Thunders. Placing our goal so illusively near, it was a tantalizing sight, which before the day was over had taken on all the qualities of a desert mirage.

The bush recedes from the sides of the Great North Road as it approaches the Zambesi, a circumstance which placed our subsequent labours in the sun's unrelieved glare. At the first repair in the open stretch we thoughtlessly laid our tools in the road. We didn't do this again, because they became so hot in a few minutes that we couldn't pick them up with our bare hands.

A swarm of *mopani* bees gathered around us at one stop, and we found that the only means of discouraging their maddening attentions lay in a furious smoking of cigarettes. Their visit was followed by the discovery that our canvas water bag had fallen from the door handle of the car, where it habitually hung, leaving us unable to quench a thirst that momentarily became more raging. In mid-afternoon a roadside water hole gave us a temporary appreciation of the feeling expressed by Gunga Din's eulogist. No water, at that point, could possibly have crawled or stunk too busily to be welcome; even the thought of the most repulsive disease that could possibly lurk in it left us entirely unmoved.

After six years of uneasy motoring that trip from Kalomo to Victoria Falls stands out in calamitous triumph. Its ending was proportionately bright. When we finally reached the luxurious Falls Hotel we could easily have been mistaken for a pair of garage mechanics, or worse; but our reception might have been tendered to visiting royalty. The Falls Hotel staff

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had seen too many safaris, hunting parties, and miscellaneous Rhodesian travellers emerge from the bush in various degrees of bedragglement to lose its poise in the presence of a human coating of sweat, dust, and grease, no matter how thick.

Unable to face sixty more miles on old tires, we tried next morning to replace them with new. As a local garage had to telegraph Bulawayo for them we were delayed at the Falls until their rather uncertain arrival. We debated the advisability of wiring Mr. Robins, but decided against it on the ground that there was no telegraph office nearer Tom's than Wankie, forty miles the other side. A message would have to be carried from Wankie by native runner, and we rather thought we might reach Tom's before the runner did.

The delay had the ultimate effect of making the start of our acquaintance with Mr. Robins a rather inauspicious one. Though we did not yet know it, he numbered among a set of strong personal prejudices an intense dislike of unpunctuality. By being punctual Mr. Robins meant doing a thing at one time and at no other. On a later occasion when we were passing through Bulawayo and had persuaded him to spend the day with us there, we arranged to meet him at nine in the morning in the lobby of the Grand Hotel. Arriving a little before nine, we sat down to wait.

When Mr. Robins entered the lobby and saw us he frowned and then walked over to comment disapprovingly on our slapdash behaviour.

'You came too early. I said I would meet you at nine.'

The lobby clock, striking as he spoke, took the final word out of his mouth.

In the meantime, however, the delay gave us a chance to

### *Mr. Robins of Tom's*

go up in a privately operated aeroplane that was taking visitors for flights over the Falls. It was a memorable experience, affording as it did the only possible means of seeing the whole sweep of the great cataract at once, and enabling us for the first time to appreciate the peculiar physical conditions that make it so spectacular and so unique.

The general level of the country above and below Victoria Falls is the same, the Zambesi suddenly pouring headlong into a deep, narrow fissure, or canyon, the perpendicular sides of which run at right angles to the course of the river. At the immediate foot of the Falls, therefore, the tremendous and suddenly narrowed volume of water rushes sideways in a churning, foaming flood. The great cleft in the plain is only a little over three hundred feet wide in some places and its depth has never been determined, though the railroad bridge that crosses it in a single graceful span is four hundred feet above average water level. From the ground the Falls are viewed from the opposite bank of the canyon, the narrowness of which allows only a small section to be seen from any one point. From the air the continuation of the cleft down river in a series of sharp zig-zags may be seen; it is forty miles, measured along the zig-zags, before its banks open out to allow the Zambesi to widen again.

Though the total width is over a mile, several islands and rocks jutting out along the edge divide the Falls into a row of individual cataracts. In some places the water takes an unbroken drop of the full four hundred feet; in others, projecting rocks break the drop to form magnificent cascades.

The Rain Forest, opposite the centre, is so named because it receives all year round the earthward return of the great cloud

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of spray, the Smoke that Thunders. At the end of the rainy season, however, when the Zambesi is in flood, the spray returns in a downpour all along the Falls. So heavy is the downpour then, and so thick the spray cloud itself, that the Falls may only be seen in glimpses from across the canyon when wind momentarily rends the obstructing veil.

The thunder, too, increases and diminishes in volume with the seasons. Standing in the Rain Forest when the river is in full flood, it is necessary to shout into a companion's ear in order to be heard. Several months after the rains are over the shouting becomes effective a few paces off. From inside the hotel, a quarter of a mile away, the sound of the flooded Falls is like the roar of an angry and nearby sea breaking itself endlessly on rocky cliffs. At low water it is still like the sea, suggesting now the roll of surf up a flat beach.

Particularly to anyone who has seen Niagara, one of the most striking features of Victoria is the completely natural state in which the latter's wild setting has been left. The power plant recently put in is only visible from a limited area at one end of the cataract, being concealed from general view by the thick surrounding bush. A little trolley line for the benefit of the aged and infirm runs down from the hotel. Each car is a tiny, silent affair, pushed by native boys whose bare feet run expertly along the narrow rails. For the guidance of the able-bodied, an occasional small sign nailed to a tree indicates the way, along bush paths, to various strategic points.

And that is all, except for the absolute minimum of precaution taken for the safety of visitors. It is possible in one or two places to climb down the steep side of the canyon opposite the Falls and to look up at them from a narrow rock ledge below.



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Here at certain points where the descent is most precipitous, a section of iron hand railing has been placed. Several bare precipices of rock jut out from the Rain Forest, giving the most unobstructed view of the Falls that may be had from the ground. There is nothing to prevent any visitor who feels so inclined from walking to the edge of any of these and plunging over.

The assumption is that visitors come to see the Falls rather than superimposed trimmings, and that anyone old enough to come is also old enough to take care of himself. As a result the modern visitor is confronted with almost the identical spectacle that greeted David Livingstone when in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-five he traced the mysterious thunder to its source.

We were just two days behind schedule when we reached Tom's, via a narrow bush road branching from the main highway. A still narrower road, posted at its entrance with ominous advice to trespassers, ran about a quarter of a mile farther through still unbroken bush.

Then a clearing suddenly appeared on the left, containing a group of low buildings surrounded by a stout, high wire fence. As we drew up at the gate the commotion that we came to recognize as the routine of arrival at Tom's broke out. It began when one of the buildings erupted with baying dogs—seven enormous Great Danes. It continued when a man who could only have been Mr. Robins emerged from a second building, shouting for a boy, who in turn came out of a third building and shouted at the dogs. The dogs had the best of it—seven angry Great Danes can make Bedlam seem a very peaceful place.

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Mr. Robins walked over to the fence, from which vantage point he loudly advised us to stay where we were until the dogs were chained up. I was more than ready to fall in with his suggestion, for though the Great Dane has always been among my favourite canine breeds I had never seen animals of any sort that looked and sounded so thoroughly anti-social as these. I was delighted to note that the fence was successfully resisting their determined efforts to leap or climb over it.

While the boy, with a good deal of difficulty, dragged away one protesting Dane after another, Douglas and I on one side and Mr. Robins on the other stood and inspected each other silently through the gate.

It was apparent at once that the mental picture I had formed of Tom's owner was a flat and colourless affair. That couldn't for a few minutes see anything but his eyes says great deal for those organs, which were clear, bright, and intensely blue, and were now returning my fascinated gaze with the most direct one I had ever met—one in which I easily read at the moment an expression of strong disapproval.

'Well,' I thought, reassuring myself, 'he's having the dogs taken away, so he must at least be thinking of letting us in.'

Only when Mr. Robins presently turned his attention to Douglas was I able to absorb further details of his remarkable appearance. Slight in build, he was just about tall enough to come up to my shoulder. His eyes were set deep under heavy, fishy white brows; the lower half of his face and his torso most to his waist were concealed behind a thick white beard, the centrally parted effect of which was evidently pro-

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duced by his habit of twisting each half separately whenever his hands were otherwise unoccupied.

Mr. Robins had on the costume which he always wore at home, indoors and out. On his head was an old-fashioned white night-cap, with its pointed end and tassel hanging rakishly over one ear. His coat was the top half of a suit of pink and white striped pyjamas. The lower legs of his khaki trousers were stuffed into mosquito boots. Around his waist was strapped a full cartridge belt from which depended a large hunting knife and a holster containing a heavy revolver.

His night-cap made it impossible to see if he were at all bald, his beard to see if he wore a collar and tie. I found later that his rather long white hair was quite as luxuriant as his beard and that his collar was finished at the throat only by a gold collar button. His sole concessions to fashion when he left Tom's were the substitution of ordinary shoes for the mosquito boots, a khaki coat for the pyjama top, and a sombrero for the night-cap. (The wide brim of the latter, topping his small person, gave him on these occasions rather the look of an animated mushroom.) Where, he inquired of me one day, would be the sense in wearing a tie when no one could possibly see it? He twisted his beard affectionately as he put this question—the beard in which his entire stock of personal vanity centred.

When the last frustrated dog had disappeared Mr. Robins greeted us by calling our attention to the tardiness of our arrival. He made no move to open the gate until he had heard our explanation and conceded that it was plausible enough—after one had accepted our original lack of wisdom in starting

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from the Roan on old tires. That part of our performance, we gathered, had been little short of half-witted.

The unusual content of his welcome address was, I thought, only exceeded in interest by the contrast between Mr. Robins' precise English diction and his very un-English looks. When he at last opened the gate his slow, deliberate bodily movements, the movements of an old man who has never done anything hurriedly in his life, contrasted quite as oddly with the alert quickness of his glance.

Even after the gate was at last open Mr. Robins did not invite us in, but instead came out himself. Motioning us to follow him, he led the way to a daub and wattle rondavel, which was set outside the fence enclosing the other buildings, a fact for which I was devoutly thankful as I listened to the muffled but still angry roars of the Great Danes.

Mr. Robins said that we might occupy the rondavel as long as we liked, adding that the only other item he would be able to contribute to our comfort would be a pint of fresh milk every day. Having heard that hospitality at Tom's followed a pattern of its own, we had packed our camp cooking outfit and laid in a stock of groceries at the Falls. As we looked around the unscreened, empty rondavel, with its mud floor, we were glad that we had not forgotten our cots, bedding, and mosquito nets.

The milk, which never failed to arrive on the dot of six in the morning, was a special touch, prompted by our letter from the Manager of Wankie. The latter, after turning the great Wankie coalfields into a tremendous colliery business, had become an active and influential member of the Southern Rhodesian legislature. He and his wife were known in the

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affectionate admiration of the whole colony as 'Wankie Thomson,' and 'Mrs. Wankie.' That Mr. Robins shared to a marked degree the general sentiment toward the Wankie Thomsons we learned by indirection only. It was as impossible for the owner of Tom's to express such an emotion in words as it was for him not to express all of his opinions.

After we had set up our cots we went over to Mr. Robins' house for tea, a function which with him never came to an end. On the table by his armchair stood what I am sure was the world's largest teapot, kept incessantly filled by a house boy. The brew from it was rather more than powerful, for the replenishment simply consisted in adding more water and more tea leaves until the latter reached a level high enough to clog the spout hopelessly.

Mr. Robins' own cup held a pint of liquid. As he sat talking or reading he automatically added at frequent intervals more tea, milk or sugar. As he never did any stirring, the sugar gradually accumulated in the cup, just as the tea leaves did in the pot. When either accumulation became inconvenient Mr. Robins shouted, 'Boy, pot!' or, 'Boy, cup!' as the case might be. The boy came in, took the utensil mentioned out and brought it back presently with only some of its solid matter removed. It was his employer's idea that he should never remove all.

Our first tea lasted until our supper time. Mr. Robins himself had no supper time. He substituted for regular meal hours a custom of eating only when he felt hungry, which the strength of his tea probably prevented from happening very often. Whenever it did happen his cook, regardless of the hour, prepared the meal that came next in rotation. Mr. Robins' breakfast might thus be served at seven in the evening, his

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dinner in the early dawn, or his luncheon in the middle of the night. This, too, was his own idea—it saved him the trouble of deciding each time just what he would like to eat in a world full of more interesting matters for consideration.

Mr. Robins' boys had been with him far too long to be anything but philosophical about their odd working hours, for which their master's eating habits were only partly responsible. A good deal of the work on Tom's was of an unusual and exacting nature and all of it was carried out under a discipline that was almost military in character. It was therefore interesting to learn that the native staff of Tom's was practically the same one employed by Mr. Robins when he had bought the place. Two or three of its members had even followed him there from a former employment.

After our own repast on the evening of our arrival we returned to Mr. Robins' house to see the guest book and to receive instruction in the rules governing a tour of Tom's.

The guest book was a tremendous ledger in which every past visitor had inscribed his name and set down under it a list of the animals he had seen on his tour. It was, we found, advisable to take a notebook and pencil around the reserve and put down the items for the list as they appeared. Accuracy with Mr. Robins was by no means limited to the matter of time, and he had a method of checking his visitor's lists to which I shall come presently.

The first rule was that a touring visitor must never, under any circumstances, get out of his car, though the car might be brought to a brief halt if photographs were desired—a very brief halt. 'If you can take a photograph at all you can take it as well in one minute as ten,' remarked Mr. Robins crisply.

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Of course, if the car actually broke down, making repairs necessary . . . But one should no more, Mr. Robins interrupted himself to look at us sternly, undertake such a tour in a vehicle likely to fail than one should go rushing about the country on a set of old tires. (To the very end of our acquaintance with Tom's owner I don't think he ever missed the chance of an allusion to those tires, though his tone, in time, became more jocose than severe.)

In the visitor's car there must be no firearms of any kind. Its occupant must not shout, wave his arms, thrust his camera through the window, drive faster than fifteen miles an hour, or do anything else calculated to shake the nerves of a denizen of the wilds. He must never throw his own finished cigarette away, but must give it to the boy who went round with him, one of whose duties it was to see that no grass fires were thus started.

The boy in question was one of Mr. Robins' boys. The visitor must, and this was the most rigid rule of all, take a member of Mr. Robins' native staff with him on his tour. The boy's presence, Mr. Robins explained, worked to the advantage of the visitor. The boy knew the best of a number of possible roads to follow around the reserve, adjusting the trip to the time the visitor had to spend. The boy would see and point out animals in the distance that inexperienced eyes would miss. He would know how to deal with any others that might become in any way obstreperous. Such a situation, Mr. Robins emphasized, must be left in the hands of the boy, the visitor doing nothing on his own initiative but following the boy's instructions implicitly.

'You realize, of course,' said Mr. Robins, 'that in not requir-

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ing you to sign a release as public reserves do I am taking personal responsibility for your safety.'

'He's not above dramatizing the reserve a bit, after all,' I thought, for Mr. Robins' previous tone in mentioning the game might have been applied to purely domesticated animals, and I now listened with a touch of scepticism to a summary of one or two situations that might arise on a tour to jeopardize a visitor's safety. 'There's not much danger, really, in a car,' I decided.

I had reason before I left the reserve to wish for a return of the confidence in our roadster that I enjoyed at that moment.

The boy on the tour would also, and not incidentally, see to it that all visitors kept the rules, reporting any infringement of them to Mr. Robins. The latter, with unusual restraint, did not state this baldly, but we read it plainly in his eye as he spoke of the boy's other duties. The accuracy of the surmise was subsequently confirmed when two men who had got out of their car on a tour made while we were there were told by Mr. Robins that the trip was never to be repeated.

The boy's final duty lay in checking the lists inscribed by visitors in the guest book. As soon as a new list was completed Mr. Robins carried the book just outside the room in which the visitors sat. He then quite audibly went over the list with the boy and made necessary alterations. Our entries were corrected several times before we hit on the pencil and notebook plan.

My first notebook list was by no means the impressive one we made as regards the total head of game seen. Herds of two and three hundred antelope or zebra were not at all unusual; lion often appeared in groups of a dozen or more. I have se-



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lected it for the variety of species we saw during a three-hour drive of about twenty miles. The animals of course were listed as they appeared.

5 tsessebe antelope, no bull

2 ostrich, with 6 chicks

2 sable antelope bulls

1 reed buck bull and 5 cows

Herd of 45 zebra

10 tsessebe

At salt pan: mixed lot of about 150, including roan, sable, zebra, water buck, warthog, impala, duiker and kudu

Troop of monkeys in trees, about 50

15 impala jumped the road, several clearing our car

13 eland antelope, including 2 bulls

Mixed herd of 20 zebra and 30 tsessebe

3 lion

2 wild pig

Herd of about 175 at water hole—impala, reed buck, roan, zebra, eland, bush buck

1 cheetah

12 kudu (3 bulls)

1 ostrich

32 roan

1 silver fox

2 leopard

3 warthog

4 lion

Two of the creatures I especially wanted to see on Tom's remained for some time conspicuously absent from our lists.

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These were giraffe and elephant. The delayed appearance of the giraffe turned out to be fortunate for me for it gave us time to establish cordial relations with Mr. Robins and so obtain permission to make longer than the regulation stops during our tours. If we had had to move on in a minute or two I should probably never have seen giraffe at all on Tom's—I certainly would not have seen the first lot we encountered.

When the boy at last said, 'Lapa giraffe,' one morning I jumped violently enough to stall the motor of the car. Looking eagerly past his pointing finger, I saw nothing but a stretch of empty dambo backed by an edging of bush.

'Where?' I cried excitedly. 'Far?'

'No, Mama—not far—near. *Lapa!*'

Douglas joined him in indicating where 'lapa,' there, was, but a good quarter of an hour had passed, during which Douglas had taken a number of photographs and my eyes had all but come out of my head before I managed to see three enormous giraffe and one smaller one standing at the edge of the dambo, not fifty yards away. Once I had seen the first the rest were easy, but the blending of the great long-necked, spotted creatures with the dappled background of the bush behind them was incredibly perfect.

Once I saw them I realized, too, that time had altered my idea, gained at a circus in early childhood, of what a giraffe itself looked like. This had caused me to search the landscape mistakenly for something reasonable in the animal line. My memory had evidently discarded as impossible the giraffe's utterly absurd, charming appearance—the short, wedge-shaped body rising steeply along the back from aft to fore; the tremendously thick base of neck tapering up to the tiny head;

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the knobbed horns rising between the upright, surprised ears to accentuate comically the facial expression of innocent, inquisitive amiability.

The quartet were quite as intrigued by our appearance as we were by theirs; when we moved on at last the youngster even trotted after us for several hundred yards, stopping only when its upper neck was caught suddenly by the jutting branch of a lone tree which it had evidently failed to notice in its anxiety to overtake us. My last backward glimpse showed its small countenance peering after us over the branch, wearing a look of hurt and baffled amazement.

One afternoon Mr. Robins invited us to tour the reserve in his company. He would, he said, drive us around in his Ford, just in case anything should happen to one of our tires. We had seen the Ford, a 1920 Model T touring car, and now discovered that its atavistic outline was not its sole claim to fame. It possessed no starting apparatus of any sort and only one speed, which was high. I almost remarked that bad tires would seem to involve somewhat less risk on a tour, but decided not to on second thought—Mr. Robins was plainly very proud of his Ford.

Half a dozen boys pushed it several hundred yards along the road, and suddenly we were off like the wind, or rather, owing to the bumpy nature of the road, like a jack-rabbit. Perched at a height which we would have had to climb to the roof of our roadster to reach, Douglas and I clung desperately to anything we could grasp. Mr. Robins clung intrepidly to the jerking steering wheel, whiskers and night-cap tassel streaming out behind him.

I decided that day that Mr. Robins' Ford accounted in no

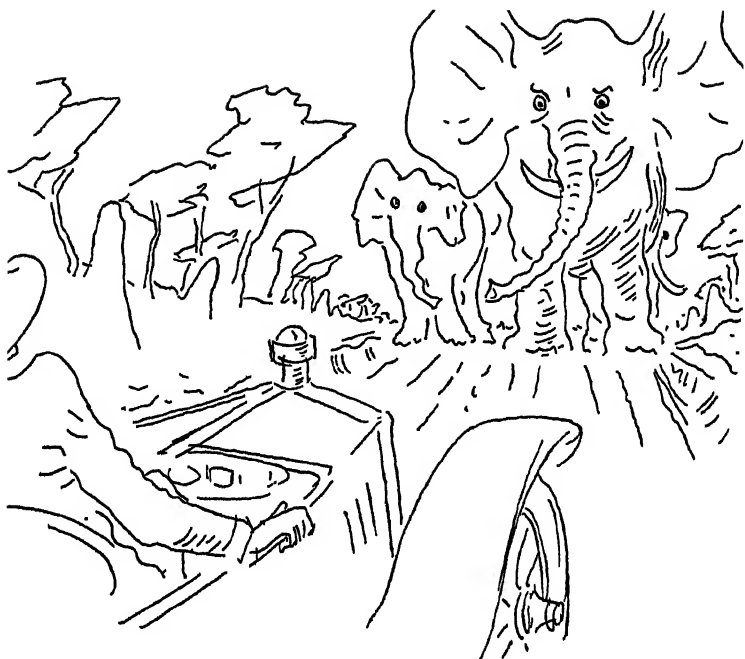
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small part for the fearless attitude displayed by his four-footed protégés—animals that knew there was no danger connected with that bounding vehicle and its accompanying din would not be easily upset by anything. Perhaps they actually recognized their benefactor in its swift and furious passing; certainly none that afternoon appeared at all alarmed; even a pair of reclining cheetah only turned their heads to stare after us lazily.

We began after a while to lose hope about seeing elephant. That they were on the reserve there was no question. Their spoor had appeared in the road a number of times; numerous trees had been broken by them. The clearing of such débris was one of the regular duties attended to by Tom's native staff. One night, returning from a visit to the Wankie Thomsons, we had heard some elephant crashing about in the bush and had even driven through the dense cloud of dust their recent passage across the road, marked by spoor and broken trees, had raised. It seemed impossible that such huge and destructive creatures could remain invisible, but some of the bush on the reserve was dense and afforded ample cover.

All the evidence of the elephant's presence was calculated to indicate that there might be something after all in the idea of possible danger to be met on the reserve, though their continued invisibility somehow managed to keep them from seeming, to me at least, quite real.

Then one morning we came round a bend in the road and there, about three hundred yards ahead of us, were three of the great Leviathans. My stomach seemed suddenly to turn over, for even at that distance they looked bigger than any animal has a right to look, and they were planted squarely in



the road, which bush on both sides made exceedingly narrow. The car in which I had felt such confidence suddenly seemed as small and flimsy as an eggshell; there was, I decided, glancing quickly round, no possible chance of turning it. Anyway, hadn't Mr. Robins said that turning away from an elephant was never a good move? It might make the most amiable member of the species decide to follow and investigate.

'Bull in front,' remarked the boy who had come in the car with us, 'two cows behind.'

This, of course, was one of the precise situations the boy knew how to handle, but glancing at him sideways I could only think what a very small boy he looked. His face was as impassive as it always was, but I had felt a stiffening of his bodily muscles as soon as the elephant appeared, and now saw that his right hand had closed tightly around the handle of the axe that lay

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in his lap. The reason for an axe's always being brought on a tour of the reserve had been interesting from a theoretical point of view. From the present practical one it was merely fantastic.

The elephant were standing perfectly still and facing us, a cloud of dust behind them indicating that they had been moving along the road to meet us and had stopped to consider the matter of our approach. What conclusion, I wondered, were they going to come to? We ourselves had, as usual, been doing only about ten miles an hour, and at signs from the boy Douglas had slowed down even more and was now blowing the horn in a series of short, widely spaced barks.

But even our crawling progress was diminishing the distance between us and the elephant far too fast and the horn didn't seem to be having a very good effect. The two cows reacted to it by remaining motionless; the bull in front began presently to swing its head and trunk slightly from side to side, giving the exact effect of a stubborn negative gesture. The boy evidently took it as such, for in a few moments, that seemed to my excited imagination like a few hours, he said:

'Bwana stop. Bwana and Mama stay here.'

He himself opened the door of the car and got out. He had the axe in his hand and was evidently going to do what Mr. Robins had said he would do if the necessity ever arose. Only a paralyzed set of throat muscles prevented my urging him to come back and think of something more sensible and think of it damned quick. The elephant weren't more than seventy-five yards away now and looked as if they were thinking of closing the rest of the gap themselves at any minute. They were, however, still stationary when the boy reached the largest convenient tree and began to swing his axe at its trunk.

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This device, under my incredulous gaze, worked like a charm. The bull's head ceased to swing at the second or third chop and the ears of all three vibrated nervously. Perhaps a dozen chips had flown when the bull turned in the road, shouldering one of the cows aside rudely. There was a brief elephantine scuffle while the cows turned too; then all of them began to move along the road away from us. After a few paces they stopped to listen, but the axe continued to fall steadily and the three suddenly wheeled together and crashed off at right angles into the bush.

'Elephant go,' said the boy as he got back into the car, a comment which struck me in the sudden relaxation of tension as excruciatingly humorous.

A swinging axe, Mr. Robins had said, had long been used by natives of the country as an effective means of moving an elephant or changing its direction of travel. It was the natives' belief that the animal read in the sound of chopping the proximity of a native village, and consequently of the great elephant pits that were always dug round it in elephant country. The theory, said Mr. Robins, might well be correct; in any case the axe had never yet failed to be effective on Tom's.

We met no more elephant in the road, but I, at least, never went round the reserve again without a feeling of acute apprehension. The axe trick was a good trick, but some of the roads on Tom's were awfully narrow, and every trick has one time to fail.

Mr. Robins himself had his own peculiar method of dealing with the largest inhabitant of the bush. Once when he drove back from Wankie to find most of his mealie patch laid flat by two elephant, he got out of the Ford and advanced upon

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them, waving his sombrero and shouting indignantly. The government official who was his companion on that occasion said that the animals, after a moment of stunned amazement, had turned tail and made off at a thunderous gallop.

'You can't blame the creatures, you know,' added the official. 'He was rather terrifying. I thanked heaven he hadn't caught me in his mealie patch!'

Though our tours of the reserve rather more than came up to expectation, it was in Tom's homestead and the person of its occupant that we found our interest becoming more and more focussed. Mr. Robins was a character to be met, with luck, but once in a lifetime; his home was a place in which the stranger was confronted by one surprise after another.

None of the group of buildings comprising it could be described from the outside as anything but a shack; the central one in which Mr. Robins lived was perhaps the most casual looking structure of all. It was made of daub and wattle, was roofed with corrugated iron, and was set flat on the ground, with no verandah anywhere. The front door opened directly into its combination sitting- and diningroom.

On first entering this room it was impossible to receive more than a general impression of congestion, of too much decrepit furniture crowded into too little space. The front door opened in halves, top and bottom, but even with the top half open the small high window in the opposite wall gave only dim light at midday. Two kerosene lamps with dark green shades lighted two small areas near the floor at night. Presently you became aware that the walls of the whole room were lined to the ceiling with shelves, stuffed to overflowing with books and magazines.



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More books and periodicals were piled on tables, chairs, and floor.

Perhaps the dimness of the light was just as well from one point of view, for Mr. Robins never allowed his boys to dust, in the fear that they might disarrange the books. They looked thoroughly disarranged already, but upon any one of them Mr. Robins could put his hand at a moment's notice. Sweeping was patently impossible, and there was no escaping a distinct impression that the accumulation of dust on the floor and elsewhere must have got its start the year the house was built.

In the bedroom at one end of the livingroom were more miscellaneous decrepit furniture, a great many more books, and the first of the series of surprises that greeted the visitor to Tom's. In the bedroom stood what I took at first glance to be an ultra modern dentist's chair, its frame made of chromium, its seat, arms, and back luxuriously upholstered in green.

It was, actually, a reading chair which Mr. Robins had ordered from London, and which was a marvellously elaborate and ingenious piece of mechanism. A compartment for books was attached to one arm, a pipe holder and ashtray to the other. Head-rest and foot-rest were both adjustable. The book-rest could be turned into a desk, adjusted at any angle, or swung aside when not in use. All adjustments could be made without getting up by means of handles down at one side that looked like a set of gear shift levers. The occupant of the chair could, if he got tired of reading or writing, put the back down flat and go to sleep.

Mr. Robins, as far as we could see, seldom took advantage of this last feature. He would talk every night as long as we ourselves could keep our eyes open, and we always left him

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adjusting the chair to reading position number one. No matter how early we rose to make our tour of the reserve he was always up before us, seated in this or one of the chairs in the living-room, reading or writing. Why his eyes had not long ago been ruined by inadequate light is a thing I shall never know.

A door in the livingroom opposite the bedroom opened on Tom's second revelation. Inside this door was another, light-tight one, leading into a photographic darkroom, the equipment of which could not be duplicated by any but an extremely active and versatile professional photographer. Beside full paraphernalia for developing and printing, there were eight cameras, including one for microscopic and one for astronomic work; there was every conceivable type of lens and there were two enlargers, one also capable of reducing.

Most of Tom's other revelations were in the outbuildings. One of these proved to be a laboratory containing an extraordinary range of scientific apparatus—geological, chemical, physical, medical. Among innumerable other items were two large and expensive microscopes in specially made tropical cases, with several cases of lenses and attachments. There was a rock-slicing machine, a like apparatus for slicing physiological tissue, an enormous slide projector and screen. On the latter could be thrown two large collections of slides, one geological in character, the other showing expertly stained tissue specimens and bacterial forms. After a visit to the darkroom and the laboratory it was possible to look, without too great shock, into the out-house that contained a seven-foot astronomic telescope.

Some slight preparation for all these things could be gained by a previous examination of the contents of Mr. Robins' bookshelves. They, with the chairs, the tables, and the floor, held

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a reference library of awe-inspiring scope. The volumes making it up were written in English, German, French, Latin, and Greek. Their writers were ancient and modern. Their subjects included physics, physiology, chemistry, biology, anatomy, bacteriology, pathology, experimental medicine, psychology, philosophy, sociology, economics, history, zoology, anthropology, agriculture, mining, metallurgy, geology, photography, and astronomy.

And Mr. Robins himself knew his books. When any debatable point in discussion arose he could pick out a volume, flip a few pages, and prove his point almost instantly. He did this frequently; points, in Mr. Robins' view, should always be proven, not guessed at.

Photography, with Mr. Robins, was merely a hobby, a relaxation. So were his researches along medical lines, though he knew a good deal about practical medicine; and none of his boys would ever accept the attention of a doctor in place of his own unless he forced them to do it. Some of the other volumes in the reference library had been collected in the interests of general accuracy. Mr. Robins' serious studies lay in the fields of geology, metallurgy, and astronomy.

Most of his periodicals were scientific in nature, too; in a number of old and recent issues were extensive contributions by Mr. Robins himself, giving results of his own researches in his three special subjects. From these we learned that Mr. Robins, living in an undusted hut set down in the Southern Rhodesian bush forty miles from the nearest town, could, if he wanted to, add six sets of letters to his name, indicating him as a Fellow of as many scientific societies. Mr. Robins was

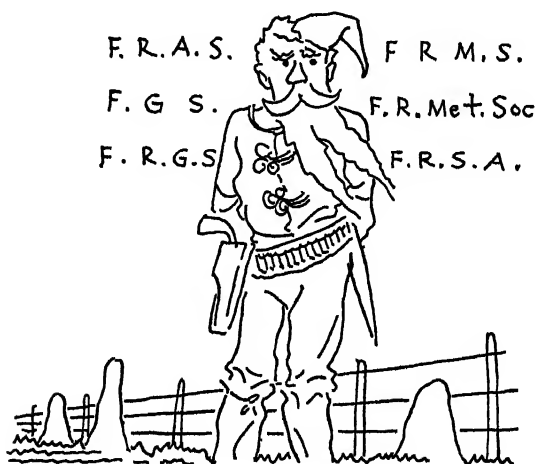
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F.R.A.S., F.G.S., F.R.G.S., F.R.M.S., F.R.Met.Soc., and F.R.S.A.

The shelves covering one wall of the livingroom were stacked with periodicals of a somewhat different character from the rest. They held American magazines of the pulp type, bursting with the stirring exploits of cowboys, desperadoes, gangsters, and detectives.

'When serious reading tires me,' explained Mr. Robins, 'I want something the dead opposite. It either sends me off to sleep or else gives me a good laugh, which is quite as relaxing. I know of no reading so opposite to serious,' he added, 'as that to be found in your magazines.'

Mr. Robins' custom, adopted instantly on learning my nationality, of referring to anything American as if it were my personal property was not always gratifying. From time to time during our visit I felt guiltily impelled to do something at once about my courts of justice, my level of literacy, my unsolved racial problems, my corrupt politicians, my crime waves, and



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my lack of intelligent interest in public affairs of all sorts. Mr. Robins derived a great deal of pleasure from 'ribbing' me about some of the lighter phases of American life, on which he also possessed a startling fund of information. My bath tub gin, my professional Southerners, my capsule culture, my readiness to join anything from a Junior League to a nudist colony, my susceptibility to all forms of ballyhoo, my provincial attitude as a tourist, my love for patent cure-alls, my encouragement of infantile self-expression, and a great many of my other idiosyncrasies came in from time to time for humorous comment.

I was partially rewarded by favourable mention of my competent training of secretaries when I filed the contents of Mr. Robins' office for him. The office occupied another small out-building set near the house. Mr. Robins' papers were in a condition more chaotic than his books; even he was unable to locate a paper without a protracted search for it. The top pigeon holes and lower compartments of an enormous, old-fashioned desk had long ago overflowed to fill the room with an extraordinary miscellany. The remainder of my reward on straightening it out came with Mr. Robins' permission to read anything in it that interested me.

Mr. Robins had evidently never torn up a receipted bill in his life. Masses of these, covering items from the telescope down to a penny's worth of tacks, mingled helter-skelter with legal documents, reprints of articles, and letters from editors and from fellow scientists. Some of the latter were belligerently controversial, some warmly congratulatory in tone.

People from every quarter of the globe had come to tour Tom's and a great many of them had evidently felt impelled to continue in correspondence some discussion brought up over

the cup of tea subsequently drunk with Tom's owner. The subjects of these letters were as diverse as the contents of Mr. Robins' library.

Other people who had never been to Tom's had written its owner too. The reserve had received a good deal of publicity from time to time; clippings from newspapers all over the world showed photographs of the animals and gave written accounts of Tom's and its owner. The appearance of each piece of publicity had elicited a flood of mail. There were, of course, a great many letters from animal lovers approving the preservation of game on Tom's.

None of the articles failed to mention Mr. Robins' unmarried state, and there were a great many letters with feminine signatures in which each writer had suggested coming out to Rhodesia to look after Mr. Robins while he looked after his game. At least some of these, and all of the appeals for money that had come in at the same time, had no doubt been inspired by published hints to the effect that Mr. Robins was the secret possessor of a fabulous fortune and had chosen to surround himself by animal instead of human life as the result of a tragic love affair.

Mr. Robins found entertainment in most of the personal touches that appeared in the published articles—the references to his 'pixie cap,' his 'piercing blue eyes,' his 'patriarchal beard,' or his 'gnome-like figure'; the captions proclaiming him a 'White Witch Doctor,' an 'Eccentric Millionaire,' a 'Misanthropic Warden of the Wilds,' a 'Mediæval Medicine Man,' or a 'Modern Merlin.' He was roused to annoyance only once, when an American paper spoke of 'his voice with its Oxford drawl.' This particular effusion appeared some time after our

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return to the Roan and nettled him to the point of writing me:

'I'm pretty well case-hardened by now, but just what is this "Oxford drawl" of which your paper speaks so glibly? I have been closely associated from time to time with a great many Oxford University graduates, and have consistently failed to detect any "drawl," Oxford or otherwise, in their speech. I expect it is heard chiefly on your stage—though perhaps in my own case the loss of several front teeth may be responsible?'

The highest pile of papers in Mr. Robins' office were of his own authorship, but were quite different in tone and style from the ones setting forth the considered results of his scientific research. In this pile were notes from minutes of meetings, and newspaper clippings, in both of which he had waged more than one lively local battle in defence of the ideal represented by the game reserve on Tom's.

On the subject of game preservation Mr. Robins brought to bear not so much his intellectual power as the full force of a strong human passion—though the fact that he could support the principle with passion without displaying a trace of maudlin sentimentality toward the animals concerned, was one of the most interesting contradictions in his highly contradictory character. Effusive and sentimental fan letters filled him with nothing but irritation or disgust.

Beyond the small start made at Tom's, Mr. Robins envisioned the ultimate establishment of a huge national park in Southern Rhodesia, to stretch from the Zambesi to the Ngamo, though he entertained an impatient contempt for what he called the 'slipshod laxity exhibited in the usual supervision of a public reserve.'

Any reserve, however, was in Mr. Robins' opinion better than

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none. In the early days of his residence, when settlers whose land bordered the public Wankie Game Reserve across the railway from Tom's had threatened the Reserve's existence on the ground that lion from it threatened their own safety, Mr. Robins had been a lion-like and successful champion of the Reserve.

Later on certain Southern Rhodesian farmers, to whom Mr. Robins referred scathingly as 'free shooters' or '*biltong* hunters' (if more venison is on hand than can be eaten fresh the excess is cut in strips, sun-dried, salted, and preserved as *biltong*), clamoured for a perpetually open season on antelope, on the ground that they brought tsetse fly to domestic cattle. Mr. Robins then waged a long verbal and written war in defence of the Southern Rhodesian antelope, subsequently recording another success in a letter to Douglas:

'Our government has now come round to the view I have long expressed publicly—they have declared every fly arca a Game Reserve, and forbidden all shooting on any of them—as they found that the free shooters were chasing the antelope all over the country—in areas far removed from any possible fly threat to domestic stock. I hope the government will now back up the action by dealing properly with poachers.'

The example for dealing with poachers set on Tom's was efficient as well as relentless. Mr. Robins had trained his boys to maintain a wonderfully co-ordinated patrol of the reserve, backed by a calling system that warned Mr. Robins almost instantaneously of the presence of a trespassing huntsman. The calling was a fascinating process. The boy who spotted the intruder went to the nearest rise of ground and uttered a cry like a long-drawn-out halloo. When it was answered by another



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member of the patrol he gave his message, which was relayed similarly to the homestead. The tone used in calling the messages was only a little louder than an ordinary speaking tone, but was very high-pitched and monotonous and had amazing carrying quality.

When the message came in Mr. Robins was off, instantly and belligerently, in his Ford. A trespasser who knew the owner of Tom's made every effort to be off the property before Mr. Robins overtook him—but the matter never rested there if an animal had been killed or wounded. The boys on Tom's were all expert trackers, and no matter how long it took, or how much trouble was involved, Mr. Robins saw that the guilty man was brought to justice.

In this connection the owner of Tom's was no respecter of persons. 'I would prosecute my own brother,' was, I am convinced, no idle boast on his part. A government officer, who was a great personal friend of his, once succumbed to sudden temptation and shot a buck on Tom's. Mr. Robins was quite courtous in this instance and invited the offender to tea—after he had made it perfectly clear that he expected to see the law take its proper course.

'What sort of fine do you think I'll get?' asked the guest.

'I don't know,' replied his host pleasantly, 'but in view of your official position I hope it's an unusually stiff one. I shall certainly do all I can to see that it is.'

Though he took justifiable pride in their fine breeding, Mr. Robins kept the Great Danes largely for the moral effect of their presence on the reserve; and he therefore carefully fostered their watchdog character. Their quarters were kept immaculately clean—there being no books to disturb here—their health

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was watched closely, and their feeding was scientifically exact. But they never received any petting; the only human beings who touched them at all were Mr. Robins himself and two boys he had trained as handlers. Led by Tiger, the enormous sire of the lot, they were almost as ferocious as they looked and sounded, a fact to which some bad scars on Mr. Robins' arm



bore witness. Tiger had once attacked a native boy and Mr. Robins had personally dragged the animal off, a deep though unacknowledged affection for Tiger having, I am sure, prevented him from using his revolver. Our Dane, Bill, and a brother owned by another employee of the Roan were taken from Tom's as puppies, and both were quite as amiable as Great Danes usually are. Bill, in fact, was amiable almost to the point of imbecility.

The firearms and knife at Mr. Robins' belt were there, too, largely for their moral effect, though a trespasser who knew him must have been beset by an uneasy conviction that he would not hesitate to use them if he considered it necessary.

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Mr. Robins' early career, a general outline of which gradually emerged during our stay with him, accounted clearly for his present independence of outlook. Before he had come to Tom's his life had been one in which independence and self-reliance were indispensable.

His formal education, begun under private tutors, had been completed at technical schools in London. At twenty-one he had sailed for Australia, where he had wandered inland as a solitary prospector as far as the Gulf of Carpentaria. Later on he led a prospecting and surveying party through New Guinea, returning to Australia to serve for a time with the North Queensland police force.

A short holiday in England was followed by his departure for South Africa, where he worked as a prospector and as a contractor of native labour, in the Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and Basutoland. Leaving as one of the first prospectors for Southern Rhodesia, he later served the Crown there in the Matabele Rebellion of 1896. At the conclusion of hostilities he led several expeditions of various character, including the one that originally opened the Wankie coalfields.

After another visit to England he headed for the Belgian Congo, where he pegged the Congo tinbelt for the Tanganyika Concessions Company. From there he was sent to Portuguese Angola, eventually to discover and peg a large diamond area and to survey part of the proposed route for the Benguela Railway.

One of the most interesting papers I had seen in his files, incidentally, was an article Mr. Robins had written when he had gone down from the Congo to look at the copper outcrops then recently discovered in Northern Rhodesia by William

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Collier and others. In this he had stated his belief that sulphur ore would be found under the oxidized outcrops; and had added the comment that the nature of the ore would require the extensive use of diamond drills. Contemporary geologists had greeted the publication of the article with a good deal of derision. It was a later geological generation that proved its truth.

A third trip to England terminated Mr. Robins' wandering when he came to Africa again he bought Tom's and settled down to a quiet life of standing off poachers, *biltong* hunters, and free shooters.

That some of Mr. Robins' earlier experiences must have been stirring ones was tantalizingly evident in an occasional remark he let drop from time to time, but these remarks were, unfortunately, never followed up. He had evidently taken encounters with hostile natives—including warring Matabele and a cannibal tribe in the Congo—as part of the day's work. When a rare animal—once a rogue elephant, once a buffalo, and at least twice a gorilla—had threatened his life or the life of a member of one of his prospecting parties, he had shot it with as little ado as possible and gone on to something of a more congenial nature. Sounded on the matter of personal adventure, his usual flow of rhetoric deserted him.

'If I could talk that sort of rot,' he once told me, 'I'd get a job on one of your magazines.'

We shared something of an adventure with Mr. Robins on the day we had originally planned to leave Tom's, when our departure was delayed by an early morning call from the native patrol. A grass fire, the message said, had broken out in the largest dambo. Footprints and other signs indicated the recent presence of a poacher, but did not tell at once whether his

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work in starting the fire was accidental or deliberate. A second outbreak, however, reported shortly after the first one proved intention without much doubt. Mr. Robins' uncompromising attitude had inevitably bred a certain amount of personal enmity against him in the poaching world.

Fire on the reserve in that terribly dry weather was, of course, bad news. The trees on Tom's would survive a conflagration as bush trees always did; the cleared space around the homestead itself seemed to make it reasonably safe. But a widespread fire sweeping through the tall grass in bush and dambo would drive all the animals from the reserve, even if it did not trap and destroy a great many of them. A fairly strong wind made it look as if the fire would spread very rapidly indeed.

Under Mr. Robins' generalship everyone on Tom's took immediate action. Two members of the native patrol were detailed to track and identify the poacher; several more to make sure that there was no third fire anywhere. Douglas and I went with Mr. Robins and the rest of his native force to tackle the ones already reported.

With no mechanical apparatus of any sort available, we had two possible means of doing this: burning off strategic points in the path of a fire, and beating it out personally. The wind, and the smallness of our force, which numbered fifteen in all including the trackers, made controlled burning impossible. The best we could do was to divide into two parties, to cover the two fires, and beat the flames out with tree branches.

The fire on which Mr. Robins, Douglas, two or three of the boys, and I went to work was moving across the big dambo in a long, narrow line of flame. The wind must have veered since it

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first started, for there was a big area of blackened stubble behind it and the far end of the line was too distant to be seen.

I remember that whole day and the succeeding night as the unreal yet vivid happenings in a nightmare are remembered. Though we paused only briefly a few times to drink some of the tea from the large thermos Mr. Robins had not neglected to bring, we seemed all through the day to lose instead of gain ground. The wind was fitful, and when it dropped the advance of the fire was like the slow, stately progress of a satanic minuet. With the rise of the wind, however, the dancers seemed suddenly to join hands and run forward with a dreadful, menacing speed. Sparks were carried high in the air, threatening new outbreaks. As these occurred fairly close by we were fortunately able to find them and stamp them out before they got a real start. Excitement kept us from feeling the heat too acutely while we worked; only when we stopped to drink tea did we realize what an inferno the dambo had become. We were all surprised later to find holes burned in our clothing, and not until the next day did it become apparent that Mr. Robins' proud facial adornment had been badly singed. Our entire persons were so blackened after the first few hours that such details were completely obscured.

We were driven through the long day by a feeling of rather despairing desperation; our first encouragement came at sunset when the wind dropped for good. But there was still a lot of fire to be put out, and we took a hasty drink of tea and went on beating.

The fall of darkness enclosed us in a small, flame-lighted world, the fantastic quality of which was intensified by the appearance of some of the creatures that were holding us there,

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out which we had not before seen. The only animals glimpsed during the day had been rabbits, field mice, and the like, which had scuttled out of holes or nests in the immediate path of the fire and scurried away.

But now some of the larger animals were passing us at intervals, running. Or were they hallucinations, called up by our tired senses? Some of the swiftly moving forms were insubstantial shadows in the smoky orange light, though the thud of rightened hooves gave the antelope an abnormal solidity. Only a herd of perhaps fifty impala went by without making a sound that could be heard above the crackle of flame; their usual leaps of twenty and thirty feet seemed, in a distorted world, to be incredibly lengthened.

A lioness moving for once with more purpose than stealth, was followed almost immediately by a jackal that had forgotten, for once, to slink. I wondered if the pair of cheetah that loped past were the same ones that had contemplated Mr. Robins' Ford so composedly a few days ago, and whether they thought the beneficent deity at the centre of that whirlwind had suddenly turned hostile and malign. We heard nothing that sounded like elephant; Mr. Robins said they had probably left the reserve when the fire first started.

'An elephant,' he did not pause in beating the flames to remark, 'has sense.'

I hoped the giraffe had gone too and that the young one we had seen had managed to keep its silly chin out of trouble among the trees. Mr. Robins was chiefly concerned for the safety of the young ostrich. It had been a long time since any ostrich had undertaken to raise a family on Tom's and he had been tremendously bucked, as he put it, by the presence of

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this year's brood. But he had already told us that ostrich made unnatural parents, and he was afraid now that the adult pair would desert their chicks in the interests of their own safety.

'There's nothing to be done about it, though,' he added, beating at the fire grimly, 'except to carry on as we are now.'

I had never felt particularly attracted by the ostrich, which struck me as a bird unreasonably pleased with itself; but I was glad to hear later that Tom's family had survived intact.

It was almost daybreak when the sudden, providential fall of a pre-season shower of rain put an end to our labours and allowed us to return to the homestead with sore throats, smarting eyes, and aching muscles. After we had sat down, unwashed, to a brief pick-up meal we all went off to catch up on sleep. Even Mr. Robins, whose physical stamina through the past day and night had proven to be nothing short of miraculous, was headed for once toward his bed instead of his reading chair.

Waking in the late evening, Douglas and I went over for a last tea and talk with our host before our departure next morning. Our conversation this time touched on nothing but the fire. While it was in progress I sketched a little scene in my notebook, showing Mr. Robins, Douglas, myself, and a line of boys advancing on the conflagration in single file. Mr. Robins was very much taken with this crude artistic effort and insisted on my duplicating it in his guest book as a proper commemoration of the occasion.

I suppose if the old gentleman had uttered a conventional 'Thank you' for our help in putting his fire out we would have feared that his own efforts had, after all, proven too much for him. His gratitude, however, was expressed in his own peculiar way.



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'Well, two days late, as usual,' he remarked, as he stood at the gate of the homestead to see us off next morning, '—but I can't say anything about your tires this time, can I? When we meet in the future,' he added, in a moment, 'we shall have to exchange salutes as fellow members of Tom's fire brigade.'

We saw Mr. Robins only two or three times again, at Tom's and in Bulawayo, but the correspondence that dated from our first visit continued after our eventual departure for my United States. Mr. Robins practically materialized with the arrival of each of his letters—whiskers, night-cap, pyjama jacket, cartridge belt, mosquito boots and all. All the familiar things were there: mention of the latest contribution to science—one of his most engaging traits being his assumption that a friend's erudition equalled his own—quip about one of my outlandish customs, reference to the state of our tires, news of a Great Dane whelping or death, comment on a new photographic wrinkle, complaint that the office papers needed filing again, account of a recent set-to with *biltong* hunter or poacher, report of a particularly fine list entered in the guest book.

Mr. Robins materialized for the final time last year. He died then, leaving Tom's as he had long planned to the government of Southern Rhodesia, to be set apart and maintained as a sanctuary for wild animals.

'The gift,' commented one newspaper, at last foregoing romantic fantasy for more impressive fact, 'is particularly generous as the donor is understood not to be a man of wealth and could at any time have sold or leased the property for sporting purposes.' In the deed of gift I understand that Mr. Robins characteristically specified the set of stringent rules to be laid

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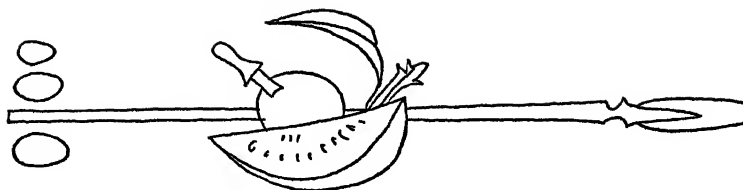
down for visitors to Tom's when it should become a Public Reserve.

A little while after Mr. Robins' death I received a letter from one of his friends in Wankie. It enclosed an envelope that Mr. Robins, following his invariable custom of preparing this detail first, had addressed to me in the Wankie hospital, just before he became too weak to write any more.

'I thought you might like to have this,' said the writer of the accompanying letter. 'Mr. Robins spoke so often of you and your husband, and was never tired of telling about the fire on Tom's and showing your drawing in the guest book to visitors.'

As I looked at the two pieces of paper, Mr. Robins of Tom's was there for the last time. There just long enough to give and receive the fireman's salute, and to say, in his own way, good-bye.





## ***Who Knows, Mama?***

IT IS HARDLY surprising that the first four years I spent at the Roan should have passed with an almost breath-taking swiftness. To the endless fascinations inherent in the Rhodesian background was added during those years the contrasting fascination of watching the mine itself take shape in concrete and steel above the ground, in an intricate pattern of tunnelling below. Take shape against the terrific odds that were largely imposed by that background—the extreme isolation, the primitive surroundings, the peculiar climatic and originally poor health conditions, the difficulties involved in the importation of thousands of tons of construction material and plant equipment, the raw and unpredictable character of the local native labour, and the necessity for bringing in from outside the entire European crew.

There were a great many people who believed those odds to be too great, who shared the scepticism voiced by a visiting engineer when he gazed up at the half-finished headframe surmounting the main hoisting shaft, shook his head, and pronounced hollowly:

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'It won't be long before monkeys are running up and down that thing.'

That not only was this prophet proven a false one, but that the mine was actually ready to turn out copper six months ahead of schedule, placed the development of the Roan, the pioneer and trail-breaker of the Rhodesian copperfields, among the great engineering feats of all time. The atmosphere immediately surrounding the achievement of such a feat is a high-tension one, charged with an urgent and steadily mounting excitement. And days spent in such an atmosphere, even if they are largely devoted to the pedestrian business of operating typewriter, are not likely to drag.

The completion of each major plant or township building was, of course, a piece of concrete evidence of achievement. Regarded as an occasion for general rejoicing, it was always celebrated by a formal opening, to which the whole European community was invited, and over which either Dave or Dorothy was usually asked to preside. It was always a point of pride with the foreman or department head who had immediately supervised the work that his opening should be well attended, and that the small ceremony involved, which it was his privilege to plan, should go off with snap and verve.

One ceremony, which did not go off at all, deserves special mention. The Irwins happened to be down in Durban on a short holiday when the domestic sewerage system in the European township was completed. Mr. McHenry, the plumbing shop foreman, put the system into operation quietly, but let it be known afterwards that he had only eschewed the usual formal opening because neither of the Irwins could be there to give it a proper impressiveness. The rest of the community,

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whose more earthbound imaginations had failed to encompass a formal opening, impressive or otherwise, in connection with a domestic sewerage system, speculated rather fearfully on the ceremonial possibilities envisioned by Mr. McHenry, and felt relieved, on the whole, that he had found himself frustrated.

The township community during the development period derived the feature that alone would have made it different from most comparably sized communities from the peculiar demands of the work. The activities involved in the latter were multitudinous in number and kind, and many a man who came out during this time came only to take part in the particular activity in which he specialized. The various jobs took widely varying lengths of time, a great many of them dovetailed each other, and as the men who were to do each one came at its start and left at its conclusion, arrivals and departures were practically incessant and the township population was in a constant state of flux.

This kaleidoscopic feature had some rather piquant by-products. The furniture installed by the company in each township house was 'basic' in character; it included, that is, only fundamental necessities, to which the occupant of a house made his own personal additions. As these personal additions were seldom considered worth taking away, almost every departure was preceded by a private sale, to which newcomers flocked to equip themselves in turn. With local shopping facilities so limited, there was scarcely anything that could not be disposed of at such a sale; even the plants in the garden were usually decorated with price tags, and it was quite an ordinary sight to see a lawn being trundled off to the home of its new owner on a procession of boy-propelled wheelbarrows.

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The ultimate achievement along this line was reached by an enterprising couple named Wardle. Having cleared their premises of personal possessions, garden and lawn, Mr. and Mrs. Wardle turned their attention to the basic furniture, selling it to residents of the government township who were innocently unaware of its character. They then obtained a fancy price for the bathroom and electric light fixtures from a second-hand dealer in Ndola. The Wardles were well on their way south before the company learned of the interesting disposition they had made of its property. Needless to say, it took firm steps after that to see that the precedent was not followed by other over-enthusiastic salesmen.

The movement about camp of household goods gave a nice little fillip to social intercourse all through the construction period. Any feminine guest with moderate powers of observation could derive a great deal of quiet entertainment from glancing around a newly established hostess's room and taking a reminiscent mental survey of the objects that supplemented its basic furniture.

'The Saunders' table against the wall—there's the mended leg that was smashed at their Boxing Day sundowner. Jolly couple, of course, but they *did* have some fearful binges; I really wonder they'd anything left that was fit to sell.'

'Mrs. Pierce-Brown's chair in the corner. What a handsome creature she was—more of a Spanish type than English, with those black eyes and all that black hair. I wonder if there was any truth in the rumour about her affair with young Carmichael? Mrs. Cranston had the chair in the first place. I remember what a ghastly price she paid for it at that shop in

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Bulawayo. But the poor dear had no proper sense of value, as I often told her.'

'The smoking stand was the Wackers' of course. Charming people for Colonials, and such amazingly well-mannered children.'

'The tea set, now—let me see. Oh, yes—that assayer chap's wife who was always trying to make up a bridge table, when she scarcely knew clubs from spades. Frightful bore, really too frightful.'

But it was the even more transient gentry, that gravitated inevitably to such a place as the Roan was during its heterogeneous development days, and that usually left for reasons other than the completion of work, that gave mining camp community life its splashes of highest colour.

Among this human flotsam was the 'remittance man' from England, whose prematurely ravaged and often unshaven face was still rather too handsome, whose cultured voice incongruously issued orders to a native gang that performed odd clean-up jobs around the property. His dismissal for incompetence in even this least skilled form of work was abruptly anticipated one day by his own unexplained departure from the mine. The explanation was found a little later, in the old and tattered newspaper photograph that had slipped down behind the bed in the rondavel he had occupied during his stay. He had once acted as A. D. C. to the royal visitor to South Africa who had suddenly announced an intention of including the Rhodesian copperfields in his travelling itinerary.

And 'Ticky' Manson, whose nickname and exit were occasioned by his impulsive robbery of the payroll, consisting of a bag of 'tickies' or threepenny pieces, destined for a gang of

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native boys employed in the government township. The loot, cached temporarily in the bottom of a petrol tin in which a neighbour's wife was fostering her favourite hibiscus, came to light when the puzzled lady decided to try transplanting her suddenly ailing shrub; and led to the subsequent discovery on Mr. Manson's person of a considerable part of the proceeds from an American bank hold-up which had taken place some months before, and which had been notable for its clever planning and execution.

And the Australian miner, whose dipsomaniac tendencies led him to shut himself up in his rondavel one weekend with only a case of whisky for company. The long fusillade of pistol shots that rent the late Sunday night air proved to be this gentleman's terrified effort to disperse the sinister trio, made up of an old man with a long green beard, a young hunch-backed woman, and a baby elephant, which he had suddenly found entrenched among his empty whisky bottles.

And, of course, Mr. Trenholm. Mr. Trenholm, whose responsible position in the purchasing department of the construction organization had been obtained through a personal letter of warm recommendation from a prominent and titled British manufacturer.

Almost from the moment of his arrival Mr. Trenholm had been recognized as a distinct addition to the social life of the community. The Saville Row cut of his clothes, the Public School intonation of his speech had come in at once for favourable comment at the afternoon teas attended by the ladies of camp, and his presence at sundowner, dinner, and bridge table was soon in constant demand. Mr. Trenholm's manner was quiet but conveyed infallibly to every woman he addressed the



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agreeable impression that a velvet cloak had just been spread at her feet. To his many other virtues he added an admirable modesty, dismissing with a boyish, deprecating smile all references to his all-England Rugby cap or to the three medals and the severe limp that indicated a later and still more distinguished service to his country.

When the announcement of Mr. Trenholm's engagement to Sister Carney of the nursing staff followed his recovery in the hospital from a bout of malaria, the news had a distinctly curdling effect on a great many afternoon cups of tea. It was not that the holders of these cups begrudged happiness to Mr. Trenholm—such a thought may be dismissed at once. It was simply that they realized how little chance he had of finding it with Sister Carney, whose manners were considerably more exuberant than refined, who had often made herself deplorably conspicuous at dance, sundowner or tennis gathering. Sister Carney herself could hardly regard a union with a man of taste and temperament so different from her own as anything but a means of bettering her own social and material position in the world.

The short-sighted lady who pointed out how much Sister Carney had quieted down since she had become engaged, learned at once that this was obviously a temporary strategy which would be abandoned immediately the matrimonial knot was safely tied. It was really a shame that Mr. Trenholm should be so taken in by a common little adventuress in a becoming uniform. It looked as if the poor dear's excellent luck at bridge were indeed an ill omen for his luck in affairs of the heart.

For it was common knowledge by this time that Mr. Trenholm's first marriage had been idyllic, but had been tragically

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terminated when his ethereal young bride of only six months had succumbed to a sudden attack of pneumonia contracted during a romantic interlude enjoyed by the pair in Italy. Some of Mr. Trenholm's closest friends on the mine were even familiar with the precise words in which she had, on her premature death-bed, bidden her stricken young husband good-bye. It had been a lovely and poetic speech, and Mr. Trenholm's tears as he recalled it were not considered at all unmanly.

His second wedding was to take place in a week, the afternoon a feminine passenger alighted from the Ndola bus and inquired at the staff mess for Mr. Trenholm. She was a large, robust woman, who was evidently not given to neglecting her conversational opportunities, for the eyes of several of her fellow bus travellers already bulged with a knowledge of her identity, her history, and her business at the Roan. She was the original Mrs. Trenholm, who, instead of expiring beautifully in Italy as a young bride, had been spending her recent years in Wales as a deserted matron. A private detective agency having lately succeeded in tracing her missing spouse to the mine, she had crossed an ocean and some two thousand miles of African continent to remind him of his neglected marital duties.

All efforts to locate Mr. Trenholm for her, however, proved vain, for that resourceful gentleman lost no time in quietly commandeering a parked car and making off once more for parts unknown. An angry Mrs. Trenholm, before starting in pursuit, found time to set a few minor matters straight, beginning with the fact that her husband's letter of recommendation had been of his own composition, he never having had

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the slightest acquaintance or connection with its alleged author. His Rugby cap had been purloined from a cousin, his medals purchased in a pawn shop, his limp, which he had acquired in early youth in a fall from a stepladder, having precluded his obtaining such trophies in a more orthodox manner. He had always, though, Mrs. Trenholm admitted with a touch of reluctant admiration in her voice, had a wonderfully convincing way with him.

Rocking under the impact of these revelations, the community temporarily forgot the third person most vitally concerned in them. When eyes at last turned curiously toward the hospital, a somewhat anticlimactic sensation was found in the fact that Sister Carney, too, had slipped quietly out of camp and had taken a train to her home in Cape Town.

The stage, in the end, however, belonged to Sister Carney, when news of her death came back to the mine several weeks later. There were conflicting reports of its precise cause, which the mine doctor, who had often been inexcusably rude to Sister Carney's critics, believed to be one not usually listed in medical dictionaries. But it was quite possible, in the doctor's opinion, for a young, strong, and perfectly healthy person to die of a broken heart.

Almost every routine departure from the Roan was preceded by at least one farewell sundowner tendered by friends of the departing. Toward the close of the development period, when the supervisors of the major departments of this work began to go, an official dinner was added to each programme of private entertainment, the former being accompanied by speeches and the presentation of a watch, a set of golf clubs, or some other suitable souvenir.

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The final such departure, that of the Irwins themselves, took place when Dave, having fulfilled his original undertaking to put the mine into production, had stayed on long enough to see its operations smoothly launched. Through the innumerable farewell functions given for them ran a strong undercurrent of emotion, for not only had they been a popular Manager and Manager's wife, but their going seemed to bring a whole epoch to its definite, nostalgic close.

The Irwins themselves were surprised by the final farewell tendered them after all the scheduled functions were over, even after their long journey home had actually begun. They started for Ndola with a little time to spare on the morning they left—Douglas and I, who were driving them in, having been delegated to see that they did this without fail. Rounding a curve in the road a few miles out from the mine, we came on a long table placed under the trees. It was covered with a snowy cloth, decorated gaily with flowers, set with glasses and with bottles of champagne, and surrounded by most of the Roan community. When the startled Irwins had alighted, the champagne was opened and everyone drank a stirrup cup with them.

That was all, and I do not know whose idea it was originally, beyond that it was conceived by someone with imagination. For that brief, unique scene by the Ndola roadside held the complete essence of the epoch that was ending, and so was the perfect flourish with which to sign it off.

Douglas and I stayed on for some time after that. The mine from which we finally took our departure was one well settled down to routine operations and the community surrounding it had a good deal in common with every other small community in the world.

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Not everything, though. The boys were still there, and around the community still lay the bush, with its queer, squatty trees and its venturesome flowers, its silence and its myriad life, its impassivity and its curious, compelling insistence. The community still had its Rhodesian background.

And I still have a pair of *veldtschoen*, put carefully away at the bottom of a trunk. The future is obscured by dark clouds now; there may, in any case, be nothing in a Rhodesian saying. But there is always Rhodesia's other saying: Who knows, Mama? Perhaps the day may come when I shall walk again through the land lying beyond the Smoke that Thunders.

